

SMITHY

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TO THE READER

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SMITHY

by

ALEXANDER
SMITH



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This is a story of an ordinary man's life from boyhood until middle-age, interrupted by four years of war. It consists chiefly of humorous anecdotes which have happened during that time.

Most of the trouble which he met was overcome by simply laughing and passing on.

To
my friend

WILLIAM FLOYD

*without whose interest and encouragement
this book would never have been written*



CHAPTER I

OUR ALEX

ALEXANDER SMITH's mother and father sat in their respective armchairs at each side of the fire. It was blowing and raining cats and dogs outside. The windows rattled in their frames, but the old couple sat silent. They had weathered many a worse storm and had so far come out on top.

The old lady said that it was an answer to her prayers, and the old gentleman agreed in silence. He would not have hurt her feelings for the world. His had been a roaming sort of life, full of adventurous episodes in all parts of the world. A born engineer, he didn't care a hang under which flag he worked so long as he could earn good money, and at last he had come to rest in retirement. But the rest was forced on to him. The firm that he worked for had gone burst and the director had finally popped himself off with a service revolver. It took him a long time to find out that there wasn't work for the young ones, let alone the old ones, so he finally came down to earth and contented himself with gardening and doing odd jobs. With the money he had sent her the old lady had saved and spent wisely, buying the house they lived in and the one next door, which they rented. Then there was that God-sent pension for the aged, which enabled them to live comfortably, but not extravagantly.

The silence was broken. With a sigh, Mrs. Smith took off her glasses and laid the evening paper down.

'What's the matter now, mate?' asked the old gentleman.

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'Oh nothing, I've just been reading the police news. There's a whole batch of motoring convictions.'

'And his name isn't among them,' said Mr. Smith.

'No, not this time.'

'I really think you'll be disappointed if you don't see it one day.'

'God forbid. I think it would be the death of me. I wouldn't dare look up again after the disgrace.'

'Don't you bother your head about Alex. He'll get through all right, he comes of the right stock.'

'I hope so. But he's such a dare-devil you never know what he's going to be up to next. I thought when he left home and took a wife I'd give over worrying, but I seem to worry more than ever now. His wife is a nice little thing and sensible, but she hasn't any control over him at all. And there's his son Sandy. Did you hear him swear when his motor tyre came off, and at the age of five too.'

'It's not a bit of use you worrying, mate. In my opinion he'll either end up in jail or as prime minister, they both start the same way. A man that gets to be a mayor starts by doing things that cause a sensation, and to do them he takes risks and either sinks or swims. If he swims fifty yards he tries a quarter of a mile, then a mile, until he gets to a certain point, and if he passes that point he gets to be prime minister. But if he don't he sinks and goes to jail for being found out.'

'Then I pray to God Alex gets out of breath and stops swimming half way. I wish he was more like his brother Sylvester. He's a thorough gentleman, both in manners and tidyness; I never have to bother about him. I cannot think who he takes after. Right from a boy he did the most outrageous things. That day when he got turned out of the church choir I thought I should have gone mad.'

'I've forgotten that. What did he do?'

'He said they had been playing cricket after the service, at the back of the church, and the grave-digger got on to them for using his tools for a wicket. He took them away and locked them up, so they couldn't find anything for a wicket. And that young beggar thought fit to pull up a gravestone, which they were using when the vicar caught them. Of course he found out who'd done it and turned him out of the choir straight away.'

'Yes, but I thought he went back again after apologizing to the vicar.'

'He did, but he didn't reign long before he got turned out again.'

'What happened?'

'Well, it's rather laughable, but not fit to repeat to anyone. In fact, the poor lad couldn't help himself. We'd had something that didn't agree with us for dinner that day; it gave us all the wind and I myself was doubled up with indigestion. In the middle of the sermon the poor lad belched, which unfortunately he couldn't keep quiet. 'Course the other boys started laughing when they heard it and it so disturbed the vicar that he had to turn round from the pulpit and tell them to be quiet. And after the service they found out who it was that had started the laughing. Sylvester was disgusted with him and wouldn't walk home with him that day.'

'Huh, and to see them dressed in their surplices and cassocks anyone would take them for little angels,' answered the old man.

'Yes, and Sylvester could never make out how it was that Alex always got more money on pay day than he did. Every service they went to, they each received a small check as they

filed out of the chancel into the choir vestry, and on every month they were given a penny for each check they had collected. I never knew until a long time after that the young beggar used to receive his first check then walk round through the other door, which was round the other side of the organ, and slip behind the other boys and get another as he came in again. I asked him what he would have said if they had found him out and all he said was, "I should tell them I'd left my handkerchief behind and went back to fetch it". He even ran out of school on the day he was fourteen, because he said the teacher had called his friend and himself out for singing out of tune, and while the teacher was thrashing his friend he made a bolt for it through the swing doors and into the playground.'

'I thought he was well liked by his teacher.'

'He was, but his own teacher couldn't teach singing and another one had to take the class. Yes, and he had the nerve to go back when he knew his own teacher would be there. He wasn't what you would call a good scholar generally, he had his likes and dislikes. If it was history he simply hated it, but if it was drawing he loved it and could even show the teacher how to draw. Once the teacher put up a bowl of flowers to draw, and when they were examined and marked according to their merit half the class was called out for punishment.

' "Now," said the teacher, as he held up some of the attempts, "those who think the boys who drew these should not be punished hold up their hands." One hand went up and that was Alex's.

' "Oh", said the teacher with surprise, "and why don't you think they ought to be punished?"

' "Because drawing is a gift and those that haven't got it can't do it."

“Oh, so that’s what you think is it.” “Yes sir,” answered Alex.

“These certainly are awful,” he said, going through them. “Some are better than others, but according to your theory there are only about four who have this gift you talk about.”

“Yes sir. For instance, I don’t want to be rude, but I don’t think you have it yourself, sir.”

There were two ways of taking that and the teacher, being a sport, took it the right way and smilingly asked why.

“Because I can draw better than you can, sir,” was the sharp answer.

“Oh, you think that, do you! Well, I’ll tell you what we will do. The class can name any object in this room and you and I will draw it in a certain time. We will get another teacher to judge which is the best, and if yours is best I will let these boys go unpunished. But if mine’s the best they can look out and you as well.”

Both the drawings were completed and judged amid great excitement from the class. The teacher, as I said, was a sport, and pinned them up side by side. The Head happened to come in at the time and without hesitation gave Alex first. Then came thundering applause, and Alex was the hero of the week. At football and cricket he was duff,’ the old woman went on. ‘He always says he cannot see what anybody can see in kicking a bit of leather about and getting kicked on the shins for fun, and as regards watching a football match, if anyone offered him a pound and a front seat at the finest football ever played he’d tell them to keep it. Once he played cricket in the school yard and got hit in the eye with the ball. That began and ended his cricket career.’

‘It’s only fools that will stand and let a man throw a

hard ball at your legs or head while you try to stop it with a bit of wood,' the old man, put in.

'There's only one sport Alex did, and did well, in fact he beat the whole school, and that was swimming. He wasn't very fast, but could keep going for hours and it was there he could get his own back when the others pulled his leg about being no footballer. "It beats me why some of you chaps spend hours doing something that's doing you no earthly good when you can't swim an inch to save your own life or anyone else's," he would say.'

'I was always the same when I was a youngster,' said the old man. 'I hated football, but swimming saved my life more than once. The teacher must have thought him a funny sort of boy though, didn't he?'

'That's what made him like him so much. He never got any good hidings, although he deserved them over and over again. During his last months at school he used to play truant twice a week with that Bernard Hancock, and do you know how I found out?'

'No, I couldn't guess.'

'Well, one day I kept him away to take him to the doctor. He had something the matter with his big toe. It wasn't much, and was quickly cured after a few days' treatment, but I wrote him a note to take to the teacher, explaining his absence. A long time after, I was routing in some old boxes in his bedroom when I came across a lot of notes in envelopes. When I opened them I found out that they were all copies of the note I sent that day. The young beggar had traced them through on a carbon sheet. 'Course I asked him about them, and he owned up what he'd done. But all the excuse he made was that he was fed up with school and couldn't learn any more. I asked him how many he'd used, and he

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said that he had to go to the doctor's twice a week to have his foot seen to, so he had to give his teacher a note every time.'

'Well I'm blowed!' cried the old man.

'You needn't be blowed,' answered the old lady. 'He's a chip off the old block, and goodness knows where you'd have been now if I hadn't a married you. You can't blame your son.'

'Yes, that's right, mate. I'd have had a yacht and servants now if it hadn't a been for you.'

'And a lot of good they'd have done you.'

'What about that time when I brought all those table-cloths and cutlery off that boat and you made me take 'em back! The firm went through the nick and owed me a lot of back wages too. They would have got me a bit back. And not only that, when I took 'em back somebody else pinched 'em soon after.'

'Well, thank God I haven't got it on my conscience,' said the old lady. 'Good heavens, it's ten o'clock, how time flies. Time we went to bed.'

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INITIATION

THE day of leaving school came at last, and not too soon to suit young Smith. The family were living in Nottingham at that time, and as lacemaking was at its boom it was decided that as Alex could draw very well he should go in for lace curtain designing where he would be able, after a while, to earn good money. Jobs were plentiful at that time, especially for boys with ability. So it was an easy matter to get him into a designer's and draughtsman's office. The excitement of getting to work soon died down when he was given the first, and rough, jobs, such as cleaning the water jars out, grinding the water colour paint which, if done properly, so as to leave no lumps in the paint, was an arm aching job and one that got Smithy into trouble from the beginning. Then he had to go early in the morning to sweep the room and make the fire, a job which always got his back up.

'I wonder what the boys at school would think if they saw me sweeping up and making blinking fires when I told them I was a curtain designer,' he said to his mother.

'Well, my lad, when you get on a bit they'll have another boy to do that. Your time will get more valuable every day if you work hard and learn.' The days and weeks passed, but they didn't seem to get another lad and Smithy began to get fed up. With the boss getting on to him and the men chaffing him, life seemed miserable, and he began to wish he was back at school.

One day the boss went away up north to sell the designs and stopped for a week. The work was stopped for two or

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three hours each day and boxing matches were held among the youngsters. They were compelled to box or go through the ordeal of being made a freeman.

The freeman order was not confined to the youngest, some of the older married men had to go through it, but when that happened the youngsters were sent out of the room. Being made a freeman was to be seized all of a sudden, lifted on to a table, trousers taken down and then you were painted all colours of the rainbow. It was useless to resist, as the odds were too many against one man.

Poor young Smithy was made a freeman nearly every day, but not without putting up a fight. Anything he could lay his hands on would go at the men's heads, including whole pots of paint which sometimes splashed on a design and ruined it, so that it had to be either scrapped or done over again. Every day Alex went home and told of some outrage against him, but he got no sympathy from his father, who told him wherever he went they did that sort of thing and sometimes worse.

'Stick it, my lad,' was his advice. 'The more they see it annoys you the more they will do it. Laugh and let them think you don't care.'

So another day started. Sometimes they played cards and if Alex won they'd make out that he'd lost, and he was forced to play to keep their minds off the freeman business. Finally the day of reckoning came and the boss walked round looking at what had been done. The work was bad and shoddy, and the foreman went through it. He was a fat little fellow and knew if he tried to stop the games he would have been a freeman without hesitation.

One morning Smithy got to work very late, arriving only about five minutes before the others were due. He had

fetches a bucket of water to fill the jars which were placed on each man's desk for washing his brushes out, and filled them with clean water. He wanted to go to the latrine, but couldn't spare the time to go down the three flights of stairs where it was situated, so there was only one thing to do and that was to use one of the jars, which he did, much to his relief. He then grabbed hold of the brush and began to sweep just as the men began to arrive.

Forgetting the jar, which he intended to take downstairs when the cleaning up was done, he carried on with making the fire, and by the time he had finished that all the men had sat down at their desks. Not long after the boss came in and sat down at his desk, which was round the corner by the side of the foreman's.

Everything was as quiet as could be. No talking was allowed when he was in unless it was about the work. Suddenly the boss asked the foreman something about a jar, and then Smithy remembered he had left it on that particular desk. 'Oh hell,' he muttered to himself as he heard the boss say, 'What is it that stinks round here Pilkington?' 'I can't smell anything,' was the answer, after one or two loud sniffs. Then a clicking of pots and the exclamation, 'Why, it's this jar'. He must have handed it to Pilko, as they used to call him. He sniffed it and then growled, 'Some dirty devil must have done it in your jar to save the trouble of going downstairs.'

Suddenly Pilko shoved his head round the corner. 'Smith, did you wash all the jars out this morning and fill them with clean water?' 'Yes, sir,' answered Smithy. 'Did you do mine and Mr. Broom's?' 'I—I think so, sir,' he stammered. 'Well you couldn't have done because this one's been used as a latrine by somebody, and it couldn't have been this morning

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so it must have been last night. Whoever it was ought to be ashamed of himself to do such a dirty trick. I know it's no use asking who it was, so we'll let the matter drop at that. Go and empty it at once.' Smithy, glad to get off so lightly, grabbed the jar and went downstairs.

The boss went out about half an hour later, then comments began to fly round, with the result that it was agreed by all that it must have been Pilko himself.

A few weeks later Smithy began to learn quickly and was promoted to a desk of his own, and another lad was got to do the dirty work. Whether it was because he got useful or that the boss got fed up with his untidiness is best left unsaid, but not a day passed without the boss calling him over the coals. 'Don't you ever wash pots at home for your mother?' he asked one day as he held his teacup, which was covered with thumb marks. 'No, sir,' answered Smithy. 'Oh, I thought not,' was the sarcastic reply.

It was Smithy's duty to show the new boy the ins and outs of the cleaning and grinding business. The latter was done outside on the landing, and one day while the tuition was taking place they heard a scuffle and a roar outside in the veterinary surgeon's yard.

Throwing open the landing window which overlooked the yard, they were amazed to see a lion fastened up with ropes, lying on a bed of straw. The stable boy was handing the doctor a red hot iron, and when the iron was applied to the body, wasn't there a roar! They were so interested watching that they didn't hear the boss come out.

'Is this what I pay you for?' he asked, pulling them in and shutting the window with a slam, which went with such force that it broke the glass. 'Now you see what you have done. You will both pay for it out of your wages,' he said.

With the result that poor Smithy got no spending money for a month.

That event didn't stop them looking out of the window. Wonderful things went on in that yard, operations on all sorts of animals. Some mornings a delightful smell of stewing rabbit floated through the window. 'What are you always cooking rabbits for?' asked Smithy of the stable lad. 'That ain't rabbit,' he said. 'It's a dog's head cooking in the pan. We have to cook them to get the flesh off the bones for examination.' Sometimes ladies brought their pets to be looked after while they were away on holiday, and the maids were sent with parcels of mutton chops, etc., for the stable lad to give them. 'Do you give it to them?' asked Smithy. 'Not on your life! All they get is some stick if they don't keep quiet. I get the chops,' he said.

One day while Smithy was hanging his head out of the window, watching them gelding a horse, he didn't see the stable lad pick up a handful of blood and flesh which had just been cut away and take aim for the open window. Plonk! It caught him right in the eye. Phew, and didn't it stink! It seemed to hang about on Smithy's person for days. But it ended the window gazing business, and the boss got a lot more paint ground after that.

At last the day came when it was to be decided whether Smithy was to become a bound apprentice to the curtain designing. His father came to the office and Smithy was called to the confab, with the result he was bound under seals and Gods knows what to be a dutiful pupil and worthy apprentice. Anyhow, the boss seemed much nicer to him after that business was settled. It may have been the premium that made him pleased, but he certainly didn't moan so much for a week or two.

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The men said his father ought to have more damn sense that to put his lad to such a rotten trade. They said that all designers either ended up in the workhouse or the asylum, the first through bad pay and the latter through puzzling their brains trying to get fresh ideas. In fact they dinned it into him so much that it made him ill. For several days Smithy went quiet, never laughed or joked, but sat at his desk as if in a trance. He was deep in thought thinking about his father's mode of life, cruising all over the world out in the open, and compared it to his own, sitting in a stuffy office over a desk. He worried himself so much that everything he did went wrong. The man who was over him had to complain to the boss that something must have come over him, because his work was all right until a few days before.

'What's this I hear about your work, Smith?' the boss asked.

Smithy hung his head and refused to answer, 'What's the matter with you, lad? Why don't you speak?'

'If you want to know, I'm fed up with it and don't want to do this work. I hate it and will run away if I have to stop. I shan't do it, I tell you; I shan't do it.'

'Come down to my office and we will see what's the matter. Why have you suddenly taken such a dislike to the work? You said you liked it a few days ago and agreed to be a bound apprentice. Have the men been saying anything to you?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Smithy. 'They say that I will end up in the workhouse or the asylum, and I think I shall end in the asylum if I don't go.'

'You had better tell your father that I would like to see him.'

At dinner time Smithy told his father, amid tears, that he wanted to be an engineer and meant to be.

Of course his father was mad about it, but when Smithy was in the other room talking it over he heard his mother say that they couldn't expect anything else, as it was obvious that he was a born engineer, especially as his father was one and his father before him for two or three generations.

The interview took place next day, and the boss said he wouldn't hold a lad to it if he didn't want to stop, so the agreement was torn up in front of them all and a smile came on young Smith's face at last. His mother always said that if it hadn't been that his dad was a mason as well as the boss it wouldn't have been done so easily.

'Well,' said his father that night, 'you want to be a mechanic, do you?'

'Yes, I do, and nothing else,' answered Smithy.

'You know what that means, getting covered with filth every day and getting up at half-past five in the morning instead of eight?'

'I'd get up at three,' was the reply, 'if I was happy.'

It was an easy matter for his father to get him into an engineer's shop, and Smithy was as happy as a bird with his overalls on and a two-foot rule hanging down his trouser leg, despite the ordeals he had to go through being a new boy. All went well for a bit until he got a little fed up with painting iron girders and machinery. 'Why can't I do a little filing and fitting?' he asked the foreman. 'Because you've got to learn to put the paint on the right side up first,' was the answer. But after that he was allowed to hold up large plates of iron while the plater straightened them with a large hammer. Sometimes the old man would tell Smithy to hit the plate, marking the place to be hit with a

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drop of spit on the end of his finger. Bang would go the heavy hammer. 'Now just look at that dint you've made in that steel,' the old man would say. 'Give us hold of that blasted hammer, or I'll hit you on the head with it. You want to practice how to hit the hammer down flat, not on its side.'

'Seems to me there's more in engineering than there seems,' said Smithy when he told his father about it.

A smile was the only answer he got.

The next job he got was with the smith, who explained that the first thing to learn about that department was not to pick up bits of hot iron, as it was bad form.

By the time he was sixteen and a half he began to fancy his chance and was sent out with a man on various jobs, to hand the tools and screw a few parts together, and it was while on one of these jobs that he got his first knowledge of sex. He was sent with a man to erect a new lift in a large hosiery factory. They were there several weeks, and during that time became very familiar with the girls who were working there. Smithy wasn't embarrassed at all, for the simple reason he hadn't had anything to do or say to girls before, but simply looked upon them as women. The jokes exchanged between the man and the girls were lost with him, but he laughed when the man laughed, as though it was his duty. At times when the man was up the ladder they would get a long pole and tickle him, passing some remark, but when they did it to Smithy he blushed, and that made them do it all the more. He didn't know why he blushed, but he did, and felt annoyed when they persisted. There was only one lavatory in the particular room they happened to be working in, and one day he had to go there. It didn't say ladies or gentlemen on it, so Smithy took it for granted that it was just there for anyone to use.

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If Smithy didn't know anything about sex when he went in, he had a good idea when he came out. The walls were covered with drawings which, even now with the experience he has had with women, make him feel sick with disgust. Not only drawings, but the explanations underneath, taught him more in five minutes than he had learnt in the two since years he had left school.

After he had worked for that firm for six months he began to want a change and more money, so he found another place where there was more variety of work and more money. There were more boys at that place, with the result that more pranks were played. Smithy didn't get on at all well with the old man on the lathe next to his. They were always rowing over tools. The old man said that Smithy pinched his that were nice and sharp and put his blunt ones in their place, and it was true as a matter of fact, because he was getting so much a dozen for turning wheels up, and when a tool was blunt it meant a waste of time going to the other end of the workshop and then having to wait your turn to grind the tool sharp again.

The wheels used to be dumped in the yard, and when a new consignment came it used to be a race to get there first so that they could pick out the easiest to work. The old man was a crafty old devil and seemed to smell when they arrived, getting there first, and before Smithy knew anything about them up would come the old man pushing a truck load of the best and smallest. And such an amused look he would give Smithy. The old fellow was bald headed and wouldn't go outside without his hat on under any circumstances. He never wore it while at work, but kept it hanging just over his machine.

It was Monday morning, and a consignment of wheels

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was due about ten o'clock. Both Smithy and he were watching for the lorry to pass the door. It came at last, and Smithy dropped his spanner and ran outside. After loading his truck with the best, he pushed it towards his machine, and there stood the old man raving like a madman. He made a rush at Smithy, who dodged between the machines.

'You young whelp! Wait till I lay my hands on you!'

'What's up with you, are you mad because I got the truck first?'

'No I ain't, but what about my hat?'

'Well, what about your hat?'

'Do you mean to say it wasn't you that nailed it to the wall? Twelve two inch nails through it?'

'I tell you it wasn't me that did it.'

'Who was it then, if it wasn't you?'

'How do I know? Find out.'

He calmed down a bit after that, and cast an envious look at the contents of the truck. 'Wait till I find him and I'll nail him to the wall!'

He simply hated the sight of Smithy, and goodness knows he had good reasons. The day before they came to collect the wheels that were finished, Smithy always picked the shoddy ones out and exchanged them for some of the old man's, and he would get the blame. That went on for a long time, but he got wise to it and afterwards always put a private mark on his work. But soon after Smithy discovered what the mark was and pinched wheel and mark as well, marking his own the same.

Smithy didn't get the sack, but had to sack himself or be killed.

It was Guy Fawkes Day, and during breakfast Smithy pulled a lot of crackers and cannons out of his pocket.

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'What shall we do with these?' he asked the other boys. 'Give your pal baldhead a fright,' said one of them. The old man's jacket was hanging on the nail, but he'd gone to breakfast in his hat, which still had a dozen holes where it had been nailed up. His pockets were filled with fireworks and a wire was run from the electric starter to one of the pockets. It was so arranged that when the old man started his machine it would make contact and off would go the fireworks.

Breakfast was over and all eyes were slyly turned towards the old man. He bent over the lathe and pushed the button, and after a few seconds up went the jacket and landed over the old man's head, knocking him on to the lathe, and before any one could move the machine started to wind him into it. The muffler he wore round his neck got caught. By a miracle he managed to reach the button and stop the machine. While some of the men were disentangling him he picked up a big spanner and flung it at Smithy, who at once grabbed his hat and coat and what few tools he could lay his hands on and made a bolt for it, out into the street, as fast as he could.

He daren't go home and he daren't go back, so he thought the best thing to do was to go and find another job. Luck favoured him, as it always does in times of trouble.

He got a job at a lace machine builders and exactly twice as much wages as he was getting at the other place. It was only a small place and there were only two youths besides himself. One man who always looked over his glasses at you took quite a fancy to Smithy and helped him in every way. Smithy liked him all right, but couldn't stand him chewing tobacco and spitting all over the shop. He would chew from morning to night and would persist in spitting.

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The bacca he smoked was rank and stank the messroom out. And oh, what a cadger, he'd cadge a new bend to put into his pipe.

Smithy had started smoking by that time, and sometimes smoked a pipe. But he daren't pull his pouch out while Spittoon, as they called him, was about.

'I'll cure that blighter of cadging,' said Smithy to one of the boys.

The same morning at breakfast old Spittoon asked as usual: 'Give us a pipe of your bacca, Smithy.'

'I'll give you a pipeful if you give me a chew of yours,' was the answer.

'I've left it in my locker, but I'll leave my pipe for you to fill while I go and fetch it,' and off he went, giving a wink to one of the men as if to say, 'It will kill the young devil'.

As soon as he was out of sight out came a tin, from which Smithy hastily filled the pipe. Then taking out his pouch he covered the top with a layer of tobacco.

'There you are my lad, that'll do you good,' said Spittoon, handing over a knob of black looking stuff. 'You want to chew it and then swaller it, it's good for the indigestion.'

'Thanks, and here's your pipe crammed full. And please don't ask me for any more.'

Spittoon lit the pipe and sat down to enjoy it. After a while he said, 'I can't do with this lad's tobacco, there ain't no taste in it. It's scented too, more like lavender than tobacco,' he added, as he emptied the ashes out.

'Do you want some more?' asked Smithy.

'Aye, I do.'

'Here you are then, it was cheap enough.'

Spittoon opened the tin and took some out to recharge his foul pipe. All of a sudden he stopped and looked and smelt.

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'Have I been smoking this?' he asked, looking savage.

"Course, didn't you like it?" asked Smithy, getting ready to run.

'Why, you young swine, I'll break your blasted neck.'

Down went the tin and he shot after Smithy, cursing like the devil. One of the men picked the tin up, and looked inside.

'Well, I'm blowed,' he said, and laughed as though his sides would split.

When he could stop laughing, he said, 'Old Spittoon 'as been 'ad at last. He's smoked a pipe of horsemuck.'

They were soon pals again, but Spittoon never cadged any more of Smithy's tobacco.

He only got into trouble once, and that was when the foreman caught him making walking-stick knobs. These were turned out of solid steel and then plated and fastened on the top of a black stick. All his pals carried a silver-knobbed stick when out at night, but the trouble was that when they dropped them a nasty dent was made, which couldn't be removed, so the steel knob was Smithy's patent. The patent came in handy once when Smithy was doing a bit of courting in a wood one night and was spied on. The chap wondered what hit him.

CHAPTER III

SMITHY MAKES UP HIS MIND

By the time he was seventeen Smithy began to fancy his chance at singing again. He had developed into a tenor, so with one of his friends who had a baritone voice they joined a male voice choir. This choir was conducted by a long, thin fellow who had a swan-necked voice but fancied he could sing as good as Caruso. His collar stood about six inches high and by the time his notes got through it they were strangled. Nevertheless he knew all about music and taught the choir several good songs, some of which Smithy used to sing as solos at concerts, etc. At one of these concerts, which was held in a chapel hall, the comedian happened to let slip a few smutty jokes. At least the parson said they were, and while the comedian was on the platform cracking his jokes the parson strode up; putting up his hands in a sort of shocked attitude he exclaimed: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I think we have had enough of this', and ordered the comedian off. 'We will now hear Correze, the great tenor, sing "The Rosary".' Smithy, who happened to be that gentleman, walked on to the platform and bowed. He daren't bow too far, as he had borrowed a pair of black trousers to go with the old-fashioned evening coat and vest which his father had worn when a young man. The trousers were very short and tight and most uncomfortable, but the climax came when he dropped a page out of his music and, on bending to pick it up, bent too far, with the result his backside came over the top of them. As luck would

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have it, the coat tails largely covered him, so while the accompaniment went on poor Correze backed off the platform amid roars of laughter.

The next calamity was the conjuror. He had been drinking, and when his turn came he was too drunk to perform.

After that the concert party dissolved, and Smithy and his friends began to find other entertainments. One of them was cycling. Four of them went together for long rides in the country, and it was on one of these trips that Smithy nearly got into serious trouble. They had cycled along the canal bank and came across a small house. It was getting dusk at the time, and just as they were passing one of them noticed a woman, partly undressed, through the bedroom window. Of course they couldn't resist dismounting, but, as it happened, the woman moved the lamp, which was lit, farther into the room, so the boys, disappointed, started shouting rude remarks as they made off. After they had gone about another mile along the bank one of them had the misfortune to get a puncture and, as was always the rule, they all stopped until it was mended. While the repair was in progress a man rode up on a cycle and collared hold of Smithy. 'Now,' he said, 'which of you was it that was using bad language against that house?'

'I don't know anything about it,' answered Smithy.

'Oh yes, you do, my lad, and you're coming along with me to the police station.'

'All right, let me get my bike then,' said Smithy, pulling his arm away from the man's grip.

Even to-day, Smithy cannot think what possessed him to do what he did, but without hesitation he gave the man a shove which shot him right into the canal.

'Come on, boys, make a run for it.'

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'What about my bike?' shouted the fellow with the puncture.

'Leave it,' shouted Smithy, 'and get on my back step.'

By the time they got hold of their machines the man had reached the other side and was climbing up the bank. He probably thought that they would push him back again if he tried to get up their side of the water.

'Wait a minute,' said Smithy, as he ran to the lock gates. 'Give me a hand to open them. Then he'll have to swim across or go to the next lock.' By the time they had them open the man had got out and stood cursing and swearing. But his words were lost on the boys, who were pedalling away for their lives.

When they arrived home the fellow who had left his cycle started to moan about it.

'Well, if that don't beat old Harry,' said Smithy. 'If it hadn't been for my presence of mind we should all be in clink now with ruined characters. Besides, the damned old bike wasn't worth five bob.' He said it was worth more than that to him. 'Let's all put to and buy him another,' said Smithy. 'I know where there's one better than that for five bob.' The bike was replaced, and everyone was glad to get out of it so cheaply, and nothing was heard about the incident afterwards.

The boys were still pals, getting on well together, until small jealousies came along over girls. They all tried to cut one another out with their clothes. If one came along with a straw hat one day, another would come with a straw hat with a red, white, and blue band. Once Smithy topped it by turning up with streamers tied round his walking-stick. After that they all adopted the idea with the result that an article appeared in the local paper about a number of

young men, not otherwise extravagantly attired, who were seen walking along the Forest top with brightly coloured ribbons dangling from their walking canes.

By this time there were strong rumours that Britain was going to war, and the boys were glad that, being round about seventeen, they would be too young and that by the time they were old enough to go it would be over and forgotten. Others said it would never come to war, but it did, with a vengeance. Smithy's brother came home one day and broke the news to them all at home that he was going to join the Naval Air Service as an engineer. His mother pleaded with him not to go, but to no avail. He came home once or twice in his uniform, and how smart he looked in it. Young Smithy looked at him with envy and pride.

'You stop and work on munitions, my lad,' said his father. 'You'd soon get sick of the uniform.'

Another year passed, and Smithy attained the age of eighteen and began to feel conscious of people looking at him as though he ought to be in the Army. He even had a white feather presented to him by a girl. One Sunday evening he was walking down one of the main streets of Nottingham with his friends, when their attention was drawn towards the station on the other side of the road. A large crowd had assembled, and eager to find out what was the matter they ran across the road, there to see a sight that decided Smithy's fate for the next few years. An ambulance train had arrived. Conveyances of all descriptions were being loaded with wounded men. Some were on stretchers, others were being helped to the carriages by ambulance men and nurses.

They all stood and watched until one fellow on a stretcher was brought out of the station moaning with agony. 'Poor

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devil,' muttered Smithy, 'he looks as though he's been through it.' 'And while such slackers as you stop at home,' answered a woman who had heard Smithy's remark.

'You want to shut your mouth,' said another woman. 'They perhaps ain't old enough yet for all you know, and another thing, why the hell should they go if they don't want to?'

'They ought to be made to go,' said the first.

'And so should you, if you want to come back like that poor devil. I bet yer ain't got no sons of yer own or yer wouldn't be so free with yer suggestions.'

The pals walked away, feeling a little guilty.

'Well, that settles it,' said Smithy. 'I am going to join up in something.'

'So am I,' said one of the others. 'What do you say if we both join the Robin Hoods?'

'You don't think I am going to be a common or garden soldier, do you?' said Smithy. 'No bloody fear; I can't see myself doing route marches and carrying a pack. Besides, they want engineers, men that can use tools.'

'Well, why don't you go on munitions and make a lot of money. I know a chap that's making about four quid a week and he's only about eighteen.'

'What! And keep getting jeered at every time you get into town! Not me. I should like to go in the Navy as engineer, but the trouble is that you've got to have served seven years' apprenticeship before they'll take you.'

'Why don't you go in the R.N.A.S., like your brother?'

'By the letters he's sent home he don't seem to be struck on it. He's been in it over a year now and I don't think he's seen a blinking aeroplane yet. They've got him making roads and pulling up trees.'

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While Smithy was having his supper that evening he never said a word, but sat deep in thought.

'What's the matter with you, my lad?' asked his mother.

'Oh, I'm just about fed up with walking around getting snubbed about not being in uniform. I think I'll join up.'

'Forget it, my lad. Your brother Syl thought it was all honey, but he knows different now.'

'Yes, but you don't understand, mother, you're not a young man, like me.'

'Well, if you mean to go I suppose it's not a bit of use me trying to stop you. What are you going to join?'

'I dunno, that's what I can't make up my mind about. There seems to be only one thing for a young chap of my ability and that's the R.N.A.S.'

'It's a dangerous game flying. It seems to me bad enough to be shot at on the ground, let alone thousands of feet up in the air.'

'But I ain't going to learn to fly, mother. I'm going as an engineer.'

'Here's your dad, see what he says about it.'

'Please yourself, my lad,' was all he said. 'There's no backing out when you've sold yourself to the King for a shilling.'

The following day Smithy went round to the firms that he had worked for and got references both for ability and character, and with the usual 'good luck to you' from the heads made his way to the recruiting office.

PART TWO

SMITHY'S CAREER IN THE
R.N.A.S.

CHAPTER I

BRASS TACKS

AFTER Smithy had timidly knocked at the door, a voice like a foghorn shouted, 'Come in'.

'Well, what do you want, my lad?'

'I want to join the Naval Air Service as a mechanic, sir.'

Smithy was then bombarded with questions.

'How old are you?'

'Eighteen, sir.'

'Where do you work and who for?'

'Finchley & Co., engineers.'

'What sort of engineers? Sanitary?'

'No, sir, mechanical.'

'Well, why the hell didn't you say so?'

'Are you physically fit in every way? Or, to put it more plainly, are you deaf or daft?'

Smithy was beginning to think that this was a nice man and wondered if all naval officers were like him. 'I'm all right as far as I know sir.'

'As far as you know, eh?'

'Yes sir.'

'Give us your papers.'

These seemed to please him after he had read them.

'These are all right, and if you pass the doctor you'll do. Get behind that screen and get undressed and wait till the doctor calls you.'

Poor Smithy sadly and slowly began to take his clothes off, wondering whether to make a rush for the door or to stick it

and see it through. Anyway, perhaps the doctor wouldn't pass him. He sat naked for about half an hour, then the door opened, and the doctor came out.

'I shall be back in about half an hour,' he said, addressing the nice individual.

'Aye, aye, sir.' Then he turned to Smithy, 'Get dressed again and wait till he comes back'.

'Shall I come again this afternoon, sir?' asked Smithy, thinking to himself, 'What a get-out!'

'No, stop here and wait. When you're in the Navy you'll get used to waiting.' He evidently didn't mean losing a client.

Whilst Smithy sat there waiting several prospective recruits came in. One fellow had no teeth, and the petty officer asked him where they were.

'I ain't got none.'

'Ain't got none ain't you? Do you think the Navy is a dentist's shop? You can't join without teeth.'

'Look here, sailor, I want to fight the blasted Jerries, not eat 'em.'

'Well, we want men that's all there and you ain't intact, so hop it and try the Army, they ain't so particular, and they might fit you up with a set of horse's teeth; they would suit your face.'

After he'd gone another fellow came who stood about five feet high.

'Well, what do you want?'

'I want to join the Navy.'

'Want to join the Navy do you! Well, you ain't big enough and there's enough cockroaches on boats now without you. Try the Army.'

'Thank you. Good afternoon.'

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At the end of half an hour two were added to the waiting list. At last the doctor came. Smithy was in first and passed the ordeal satisfactorily, the doctor being quite friendly.

'You'll do; give this to the petty officer outside and he will tell you what to do next.'

In a quarter of an hour he was an engineer of the R.N.A.S. and was given a railway pass to take him to London, together with the petty officer's parting advice, 'Keep your nose clean and you'll get on in the Navy'.

The trouble with Smithy was that he couldn't and didn't keep his nose clean, as you will read later. He couldn't and wouldn't stand discipline, and that is the reason he joined as air mechanic and was discharged as air mechanic without as much as a recommendation for promotion. After the usual ceremony of the baby son leaving home, he found himself at Hammersmith skating rink, which was at that time headquarters of the Air Service for the dishing out of equipment. After interviewing a few more officers large and small, he was sent to what was called Room A. His first impression of Room A was the interior of a convict prison. One man was standing with a pencil in his hand taking down name, height, width, size of head, etc., while another went round the man with a tape measure bawling out figures like some auctioneer selling cattle. As each size was shouted out the clothes were thrown over. Pants, shirts, jerseys, hats, etc. Then came a name stamp complete with two pots of paint — black and white. Each garment had to have the name stamped on plainly so that if anybody pinched a shirt they had to pinch the name at the same time. This did not comply with the P.O.'s advice: 'If before a kit inspection you are anything short, for Christ's sake pinch somebody else's, or you're in for a bad time.'

Next came the dressing up parade. In this room men were undressing, removing all traces of civil life. Smithy looked round at the different faces. Some were of the bulldog breed, others were of the meek and mild sort, each occupied with the same task. The meek and mild sort looked most uncomfortable, as though they had been used to wearing silk underwear and the naval shirts itched and scraped their skin. The bulldog type wore a pleased expression, as though they had never had such a good shirt to their backs before. There was also the immaculate type, trying to take the creases out of clothes and make collars lie flat.

When the boots were dished out that put the lid on. The soles were about four inches thick and the uppers were so stiff it was impossible to bend them.

'Blimy,' said Smithy to the chap next to him, 'I'm damn sure these were never meant to fly in. They'd weigh any aeroplane down. One thing, they'd be all right to take off and throw over the side at a Jerry, he wouldn't want hitting twice.'

Next came the puttee business. 'How the hell do you work these things?' asked Smithy. He wound them round his legs half a dozen times; sometimes there was some short when he got to the top and sometimes there was too much left over. 'To hell with the puttees, I'll put my slacks on, they don't want so much slavering about with.'

When everybody was dressed the P.O. blew his whistle to fall in, and what a crowd they looked! Some had bowler hats and service tunics, others civvy trousers with blue jerseys, and some had peaked hats with no band or badge on them. The reason was that there was a shortage of several things and 'we had to make the best job we could of what clothing we could get hold of', as Smithy explained to an old

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lady who stopped him to ask what regiment he belonged to. On arriving at the station, they discovered where they were bound for — Sheerness. 'Blimy, that — hole!' one of the men commented.

'What's up with Sheerness?'

'You wait till you get there, my lads. Nothing but officers walking about. If you walk up the main street your arm will drop off with saluting by the time you get to the other end.'

'Sounds cheerful,' murmured Smithy.

On arriving, they were met by a Chief Petty Officer, who barked his orders like a dog. 'Fall in, right turn, quick march.'

One of the chaps started to whistle. The C.P.O. nearly jumped down the poor chap's throat. 'What the devil do you think you are in? The Salvation Army?' Afterwards there was silence for the rest of the way. When they arrived at the headquarters Smithy looked round for the aeroplanes, but all he could see was a parade ground covered with men doing physical jerks. 'Crikey, we're in for a good time,' he thought to himself, 'especially in these damn boots.'

'Halt. Right turn,' was the order. After waiting for about an hour an officer galloped up on horseback and stopped in front of them. He stood, or rather the horse stood, and he surveyed them through a monocle; then he rode round to the back.

'Huh, another raw crowd to break in, eh, Petty Officer?'

'Yes sir,' he answered with a grin.

'Right. Hold my horse.' The P.O. nearly fell over himself to hold that horse, he didn't seem able to get there quick enough. Then the gentleman with the monocle spoke. He spoke so sharp that he'd started the next word before he'd finished the first.

'Now, you men, you're here to do as you're told, and to do it smartly. You no longer belong to yourselves, you belong to the King and you must obey the orders given to you by your superior officers, even if it means giving your life. Now, I am going to read to you the articles of war, and you must pay strict attention as there will be no excuse if you disobey any of the following rules, which are punishable by imprisonment or death.'

'O struth,' thought Smithy, 'what have I dropped in for? And to think I walked into it with my eyes open.'

The officer opened a book and read pages and pages of do's and don'ts, with each sentence ending up with 'You will be shot at dawn', or 'You will be sent to penal servitude for life'.

After he had been reading about half an hour one chap fainted and rolled on the ground. But Mr. Monocle simply paused in his little speech and waved his hand. 'Take that man away,' he said, and carried on as though nothing had happened, still shooting men at dawn, etc. By the time he had finished they had carried six men to the sick bay in fainting fits.

Then he hadn't finished.

'Only the other day a man was placed with his back to that wall,' he said, pointing to a large wall at the end of the parade ground, 'and shot dead. That man had drunk freely in a local public-house, with the result he gave information to a stranger regarding an air station that was being built. A naval officer overheard him and sent an armed escort after him. With the result that after a court martial he was sentenced to death.'

With a final look at the poor devils before him, just to satisfy himself that they were all shivering in their shoes,

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he told them to dismiss. After a parade dismisses, as a rule there is a babble of tongues, but after that dismissal not a word was uttered, each man too frightened to say anything for fear he said something that might lead to a shooting expedition.

The bugle sounded for parade once more.

'Recruits fall in.'

'Oh criks, what else are they going to tell us?' thought Smithy.

This time it was to show where to sling hammocks and where to eat, etc. Then the rest of the evening was given for amusements, letter writing, and so forth.

Smithy's heart felt sad, but the letter he wrote home showed nothing of that.

Once more the bugle. 'Pipe down for the night.'

Fancy trying to sleep after all that! Poor Smithy got very little. It took him an hour rigging his hammock up and another to get into it. They were slung up on rails about six feet high, and if the knots at each end weren't secure down came the lot, sometimes head first.

After being in bed, or rather the hammock, for half an hour, the place was worse than a piggery, snores and grunts all round. Smithy covered his head with the blankets and succeeded in dozing off, dreaming of firing squads and prisons.

He was awakened with a start. Somebody was shaking his hammock, a lantern was shone into his face. 'Oh God, they have come to take me out and shoot me,' thought Smithy.

When he properly awoke he sat up and asked what was the matter.

'What's your name?' the P.O. asked.

'Smith. No. 45270.'

'It's not you I want,' he said, and carried on to the next chap to rouse him.

After waking everybody up he went out, saying he wanted a man who had come in drunk, but couldn't find him.

Smithy tossed and turned and thought what a bloody fool he had been to give up his freedom for that life, and eventually went to sleep wondering what to-morrow would bring.

The bugle sounded the reveille, and the P.O. went up and down shouting, 'Wakey, wakey, wakey, Lashup and stow. The sun is melting the pitch on the deck. Wakey, wakey, wakey.'

Soon the dormitory was alive with men taking their towels and soap to the washhouse for the morning ablution. Then came the cocoa parade; each man had a basin of this beverage, which was like sand and sugar with bacon-fat floating on top. Still, on a cold morning at six o'clock it went down all right.

After that, parade for physical drill. What a game, running round the ground twisting into all shapes, bending forward and backward. Smithy's feet began to blister and swell till he could hardly move. The P.O. spotted him.

'What's the matter with you, my lad?'

'My feet hurt, sir,' he said.

'You'll have to get used to that; go on, get a move on.'

'To hell with this,' said Smithy to himself. 'I'm going to get out of doing this every day if there is any ways and means at all.'

He looked round and noticed a number of men walking around doing nothing. 'If they can get out of it I can,' thought Smithy.

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Then came breakfast. The grub was good, and plenty of it. There was haddock, boiled bacon, or salmon, but one man, one course, he couldn't have all three. Each man had a good helping and had his belly full, despite the rush to get near the chap that was serving out.

After half an hour came the order to fall in for grand parade, where everybody had to attend, from the officers to the lowest rating.

'Attention!' Morning inspection, the C.O. in front, followed by the first lieutenant, who was followed by a petty officer. All three walked slowly round the ranks, the C.O. passing remarks which were written down in the P.O.'s notebook, such as 'Get your hair cut', or 'Get a shave', 'Why haven't you cleaned the back of your boots?'

'They passed by me without comment and I offered up a prayer,' wrote Smithy to his mother that night.

'All correct,' said the C.O. 'Carry on.'

'Form fours,' came the order. 'Form fours, form two deep,' then 'form fours' again. The party that Smithy was in marched away round to the back of the building and there they were told to stand easy. The petty officer in charge of them was a proper old seaman who had seen several years in the Navy. He had rather a kind expression and didn't bark his orders out like the last one.

'Now men, I have brought you round here out of the way so that you can stand easy while I give you another lecture. But this one is not so fierce as the one the C.O. dished out to you; as a matter of fact it is a little bit of good advice, and it will pay you to listen carefully. Now, my hearties, remember you're in the Navy now and you've got to do what the blokes says and it's no good squealing. As regards what that leatherneck told you, well, you want to take that

with a pinch of salt, because he's only there to put the breeze up you.'

'What's a leatherneck?' asked one of the men.

'A leatherneck is a damn nuisance on a ship and no sailor has any love for him, in English, a leatherneck is a marine, and a marine ain't a sailor nor a soldier, nowt but a misfit. They walk around the boat as though they own the blasted thing, and they're always ready to do a sailor a rotten turn, but it's no use me telling you, you'll find all you want to know about 'em when you gets aboard a ship. But I'll just tell you this, whenever you get the chance to kick a marine, kick him hard and damned hard, because they'll kick you when you ain't lookin'.'

It was easy to see that this petty officer didn't like marines, and it was a good thing for him that the C.O. wasn't round the corner listening in.

Now to get on with the advice.

'Remember you can do ought you like in the Navy, but for Christ's sake don't get copped; if you do, you're for it. Does any of you know what *Dieu et mon droit* means? No, my hearty, it don't mean nowt of the sort; it's got a different meanin' altogether in the Navy. I'll tell you what it means to us. B—— you Jack, I'm all right, pull up the ladder, I'm aboard. And that means, "Man Mind Thyself".'

'Now another thing I've got to tell you about is women. You can go where you like when you're on leave and we don't ask you whether you're married or single, but in all naval ports there are plenty of women; some of them are the goods and some ain't, and if you goes with one that ain't and click for a packet, don't keep it to yourself, but report sick at once.

'It's no use you blushing over, we call a spade a spade in

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the Navy and get right down to brass tacks. No beating about the bush neither. Well that's that, now for another bit of advice.

'If you go out and gets tight one night and happens to be one of them blokes who kicks up a row and wants to fight every one you meets, don't come back to your ship until you're sober or you might meet an officer and want to fight him.

'You see, it's like this, you only gets ten days for over-staying your leave. That is, of course, if you can tell a good yarn and the bloke believes it, but you get ten years if you biff an officer under the jaw.

'Now another thing. If we'd got a house here and they wanted it shifted round the corner, how do you think it would be done?'

One bright fellow answered: 'Take it to pieces, then rebuild it.'

'Oh no we wouldn't, me hearty. Oh no. We'd all get round it and lift it as it was, then carry it round the corner and drop it where we wanted it.'

Everybody laughed and thought he'd gone potty, but he assured them he wasn't joking, by telling them that everything in the Navy was done by brute strength and damned ignorance, and that unless orders came from the admiral himself nobody was allowed to think for himself or offer any suggestions, as they weren't paid to think. All the thinking was done by the big bugs and handed down to the junior officers by degrees until it got to the bottom, and by that time it simply came down to brute strength and ignorance.

'So there's the motto, my hearties. Don't make suggestions or you will only be exceeding your duty, and if you do happen to make a brain-wave idea sometime, and tell it to

the rank above you, he'll tell it to the rank above him, and get the credit, and so on, so you might as well keep your mouth shut and say nowt.'

After a little further advice regarding discipline the party was dismissed, and each man felt a little relieved and happier than the day before. Another five minutes and the bugle sounded for recruits to fall in for drill. This properly put the damper on poor Smithy. For two solid hours they marched and doubled round that parade ground. Smithy's feet were all blistered, but he decided to stick it until dinner time.

The dinner bugle sounded at last, and Smithy decided to find the petty officer and ask him his advice about sore feet.

His advice was to report sick, but only if they were really bad, because if the doctor thought a man was swinging the lead he would find him something to do that would be worse than drill.

Timidly Smithy went to the sick bay and knocked on the door.

'Come in. Well, what do you want?'

'My feet are covered with blisters, sir, and I can't walk.'

'Take off your boots. Let's have a look at them.'

Off came the boots. 'H'm, when did you wash them last? Go and wash them, then I can see what's the matter; you don't expect me to see through your socks do you?'

Smithy turned to go to the washhouse, and was about to close the door when the officer shouted to him to take his bayonets off before he came back.

'What do you mean, sir?'

The steward answered with a snarl: 'Get yer toe nails cut.'

On returning with washed and manicured feet Smithy

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found a few more waiting to see the doctor. One fellow complained of pains in his tummy.

'Report at six every morning and run round the parade ground twenty times; that's the best cure for constipation,' was the doctor's advice.

Smithy began to wonder whether he'd find a similar cure for sore feet. The next fellow called in had a rash on his chest. After a careful examination the doctor told him it was a flea that had been having a feed and to go back to duty at once. Then came a fellow with toothache.

'Get in that chair,' said the doctor, 'and show me the tooth.'

Then out came his pliers. There was no cocaine or gas, just brute strength and damned ignorance again. The poor chap struggled while the steward held his head down, then with an exclamation of triumph from the doctor the tooth came out. Excused duty until to-morrow was all he got.

Then 'Air-mechanic Smith' was sung out. The doctor looked at his feet. 'H'm, pretty bad,' then, after he'd put some powder on them, dismissed him with, 'Excused drill until better, but light duties'.

It was grand to sit cleaning bayonets with a bit of emery paper while the other poor devils were running round the ground, and didn't they look with envy at Smithy, wondering how he had managed it. This went down fine for the first two days, but it was too good to be true. The damper came one morning when the sick party fell in. There were about a dozen sick altogether.

The petty officer who dished the duties out detailed two to attend at the cook-house, four to the stores, four to the mess deck, and the rest, to which Smithy happened to belong, to report to Petty Officer Jones.

S M I T H Y

They found P.O. Jones, who received them with a smile. 'Come with me and I'll show you what to do.'

He led them to the end of the field where the latrines were and gave each of them a pole. 'There's a big hole over in that field, I want you to empty all the buckets into it, then fill it in.'

Oh, how Smithy envied those fellows at drill. His feet were better already, and he would be sure to report for drill in the morning.

He found out later that that was the doctor's way of finding out whether a man was fit for duty again. There weren't many that would take that medicine. Blisters or tummyache, nine out of ten reported for duty again after a dose of that.

CHAPTER II

A HOME FROM HOME

THE doctor gave a sickly smile when Smithy went to report that his feet were much better and that he thought he could resume normal duties again. 'What's the matter, my lad? Don't you like the medicine I gave you?'

'Some of it was all right, sir, but not the pick-me-up tonic.'

'Very well. Carry on.'

Needless to say, Mr. Smith didn't report sick again.

Every day men arrived and men were drafted to different stations. The longest anyone stopped at the training depot was about three weeks. Three months would have killed a horse. Every day Smithy listened carefully for his name and number being shouted out, and one day he got a false alarm.

'Can anyone here drive a Rolls-Royce?' was shouted.

About ten men put their hands up, Smithy included. The Chief P.O. picked four with Smithy, and told them to report to P.O. Jackson. 'Thank the Lord it's Jackson and not Jones of latrine fame,' they thought, as they doubled off to find this P.O. This gentleman took them to the officers' tennis courts and, pointing to a ton roller, told them to pull it up and down until dinner time. Well of all the B——s! So this was the Rolls-Royce was it! This is the last time Air-mechanic Smith volunteers for anything.

After about three times up and down the ground a clerk came running up shouting, 'Air-mechanic Smith'.

'I'm him,' shouted Smithy, glad of the chance to get off the Rolls-Royce.

'You're wanted at the office now.'

Off he shot.

'Are you Smith, No. 45270?' asked the P.O.

'Yes, sir.'

'Go and pack your things and be ready to catch the ten o'clock train to London.'

You couldn't see Smithy's backside for dust. He didn't care a damn where he was going as long as he was away from that hell on earth.

There were about twelve of them on the draft, including a P.O. Nobody had any idea where they were going, and they daren't ask the P.O. But after a few changes of trains they arrived at Rochford, a little place near Southend. A lorry was waiting at the station and conveyed them and their baggage to the aerodrome.

Rochford air station was then only a small affair, the full complement consisted of about twenty men, one gun, and a small aeroplane hangar. It was supposed to be a mobile station, which was to be packed off at an hour's notice and moved to another part of the country. The new ratings were lined up for inspection. The officer in charge just glanced and spoke to the Chief P.O.

'What the devil they've sent these men here for I don't know. I don't know what to do with the men I've got already let alone these. Take them over to their sleeping quarters and show them the routine.'

The sleeping quarters turned out to be an old barn at the end of a field. It was a bit draughty, but the roof was good and there was plenty of room to sling the hammocks, and a small stream ran just outside, so the toilet department was all right.

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At the next parade the C.O. scratched his head, wondering what to give the men to do. Some were told to clean the lorries and others to pick up bits of paper that lay about the camp. 'Talk about home from home,' said Smithy, 'this is too good to last, I bet there is a catch in it somewhere.'

But there wasn't any catch in it for quite a while. Every other night the men were allowed the evening off and found their way to Southend, which was only a few minutes' ride in the train, and every month a week-end off, with a railway voucher which enabled them to travel half price.

One morning Smithy was instructed to clean a motor cycle which had a machine-gun carriage attached to the side. After Smithy had spent nearly all the day doing it he decided to start the engine; the engine sprang to life and it was too much of a temptation not to sit on it and just run round the camp, especially as the C.O. and Chief P.O. had gone over to the barn to inspect the quarters. No sooner had he put the gear in and let the clutch down than the machine shot forward. Poor Smithy went round and round, each circle getting larger and larger, the heavy weight at the side wouldn't let it run straight and he couldn't stop it. The C.O.'s car stood right in the track and the next time round would be a bang if the circle got wider, which it did, and ended with a bump right into the radiator of the car. Water spurted out and soon a crowd came round, including the Chief P.O. 'What the devil do you think you're doing? Crikey, you'll cop it when the C.O. sees his car. He was going to a dance to-night. That will mean another ten days on top of the sentence you'll get.'

Poor Smithy stammered and blushed as the C.P.O. took all particulars. 'Right, report at the C.O.'s tent at six o'clock to-night.'

SMITHY

Smithy tried to remember the articles of war which the marine had read and wondered if there was any death sentence for smashing a car's radiator. He thought of deserting. It would be easy to walk out of the camp without anyone seeing him, but then again they would fetch him back and it would certainly be death then for desertion while at war. There was only one thing to do and that was think of a good excuse. He thought of a hundred and one excuses and at last decided on one which put the blame on the motor bike.

Six o'clock. The bugle for defaulters to fall in sounded. Smithy was the only one that day.

'Air-mechanic Smith,' shouted the P.O.

'Here sir.'

'When the C.O. comes in and I shout your name run to his table and take your hat off, then stand to attention.'

The fateful moment arrived and Smithy faced the C.O., who seemed to look through him.

'Air-mechanic Smith. Charged with riding a motor cycle belonging to the R.N.A.S. without permission, also damaging the machine by running into a car, the radiator of which is badly damaged.'

'Whose car was run into, Petty Officer?'

'Your car, sir.'

'What, my car!'

'Yes, sir.'

'What the devil were you doing to run into my car?'

'Well sir,' stammered Smithy, 'it was like this. I had been cleaning the motor cycle with paraffin and I thought I'd run the engine to burn it off. But when I started it, it must have been in gear, because it started to run away and I just managed to grab hold of it and jump on, then when I was on I couldn't stop it, because I was going round and round and I daren't

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take my eyes off the road to look which lever to pull it out of gear; then it all happened at once and the next thing I knew was I'd hit something and stopped dead.'

'Oh, and that something happened to be my car. That's no excuse for starting the engine.'

'Well, sir, I hadn't seen a motor cycle of that make before, and I thought I would like to see the engine running. Really, sir, I'd no intention of getting on it at all, but if I hadn't it would have run on its own and might have killed somebody.'

'You're one of the new men, aren't you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How long have you been in the service?'

'About a fortnight, sir.'

'Wait here until I have seen my car and the damage you have done to the cycle.'

He came back in about a quarter of an hour, and sat down at his desk. 'Now for it,' thought Smithy.

'Well,' he said, 'I have considered your case and I have come to the conclusion that it was more for curiosity than a crime; or we will call it a thirst for knowledge. You mustn't interfere with anything you don't understand. I'll sentence you to ten days confined to barracks.'

'Ten days C.B.,' sang out the P.O., 'right turn, dismiss.'

'Phew! that's over,' sighed Smithy, 'and I thought I was going to get it in the neck proper.'

The fellows all waited to see how he'd gone on. One of the old hands laughed and said: 'You don't want to let that bother you, chum. You'll be able to get out if you want to just the same.'

'Well, to tell you the truth I am a bit disappointed. I wanted to meet a bird in Southend to-night. She'll think I've mugged her.'

'Now listen here, chum. No one will know whether you're out or not. If the P.O. happens to remember about you, and misses you, tell him that you went over to the barn to have a bath. Besides you don't think the P.O. will bother his head about you when he's settled down to a dicky hand at cards, do you? You take my tip and clear out if you wants to.'

Smithy decided to remain in the camp for that night just to see if they would want him. But nobody ever mentioned his name, so he went out the next two nights with no painful results. On the Friday morning a notice was posted on the board with the names of the men due for a week-end off, and poor Smithy's name headed the list, but at the side was written, 'cancelled'. He was confined to barracks and that meant he would have to forgo this leave and wait until his time came round again, and that meant waiting another month. It was damned hard lines as he had just got a new suit and had so much looked forward to going home for the first time in his uniform. Smithy was not one of the type that go about with a serious face, as though he had all the world's trouble on his shoulders, but this business had put the lid on things and made him feel very much down on his luck. It happened that the fellow who told him to go out as usual was next man to him on the early parade. 'What's up Smithy? Anybody'd think you were dying by the look on your face.'

'So would you too, if you'd had your leave stopped and the first long week-end too, and all through that blinking motor bike.'

'Look here, chum. Wait till to-night and I'll tell you what to do. When you know the ropes like I do you'll be able to pinch an aeroplane to go home on leave in, and they wouldn't miss it. Come round to my tent about six and we'll talk it over.'

Smithy was there at six all right. 'Now all you've got to

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do is to send a telegram home and tell them to send one back that your old man is very ill, or dying if you like, and that he wants to see you, then when it comes take it to the C.O. and he'll let you off. He ain't so bad and I think he has got a bit of feeling.'

The telegram was dispatched that same night, and one arrived the following morning bearing the sad news, the come-at-once sort.

He learnt after that his mother refused to send such a telegram as she was sure no good would come of it, but Smithy was blessed with a sporty sister older than himself and she sent it without his mother knowing. The message was shown to the C.O., who read it and passed the remark that this man was doing a spell of C.B.

'Ten days, sir,' answered the P.O.

'Well, let him go this time, and he can finish the ten days when he returns.'

Oh my, didn't he paint the town red!

All dressed up in navy blue with gold dicky birds on his sleeve, white topped hat, etc. Smithy had had his suit made just as he wanted it. Turned up bottoms to the trousers, vest pocket in the coat. Shoes with toecaps, a thing that's a crime in the Navy. In fact, if that marine bloke had seen him it would have sent him raving mad.

The leave was all too short. According to Smithy, he had flown every make of seaplane. Been in air duels and crashed several times. But he took great care not to mention to his girl admirers the latrines he had emptied.

He returned on the Monday morning and carried on as usual. After about two months idling about, he got a real job of engineering. It happened that the C.O. had lost a spanner which was a special one for removing the wheels of his car.

Every man was questioned and nobody knew anything about it, so he asked if anyone could make one, as there was a forge on the station with a few tools.

'Yes, sir,' shouted Smithy, 'I could make you one.'

'Right, carry on with it at once,' answered the C.O.

'Will you want somebody to help you?' asked the P.O.

'I could do with somebody to strike with the big hammer and someone to blow the bellows.'

'Right, take who you want out of these men,' he said, pointing to a group waiting to be given a job.

The forge was raked out of a hut and tools got together. Then a pitch was sighted for the smithy, this was well out of sight under a group of trees.

After everything was nicely fixed and they had had a little smoke they decided to start the job.

'What the devil are we going to make it out of?' asked Smithy.

'Iron, of course, you silly ass. You don't expect you're going to make one out of a lump of wood do you?'

'I know all about that, but where will we get the iron from, chump?'

'Go and ask the P.O., he'll know.'

All the help they got from him was: 'What do you think this camp is, a bloody iron foundry? Go and find some or dig some up.'

They eventually found a plough in an old barn in one of the fields. This was soon dismantled and a nice piece of steel was found that would just do. Soon the sparks began to fly and the anvil rang. It took two days to make the spanner and one minute to break it. The wheel nut was so stubborn that the C.O. had to hit the end of the spanner with a hammer; he gave it one swipe, when crack, right across.

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'Christ, I'm glad I didn't do it,' said Smithy to his mate. 'There you are, you see, there's an example of brute strength and damned ignorance. If he had let me do it I shouldn't have broke it.'

'Well, what's the good of moaning? We should have been out of work and we have got another to make, so what's the odds.'

Another two days saw another spanner made and this was a beauty. It stood all the C.O. could give it with a big hammer; in fact the nut broke off.

'Damn it,' whispered the C.O., 'it's a damn good spanner, anyway.'

As luck would have it, he had a spare nut and fixed it straight away.

'I wondered why he didn't say his prayers when he broke that nut,' said Jack the striker.

The Bloke was so pleased Smithy thought he was going to be promoted on the spot, and he might have been if at that moment the farmer who owned the plough hadn't come up and played merry hell.

He was in a rage.

'I want to see the officer in charge here,' he bellowed.

'What do you want here?' asked the C.O.

'What do I want? You've got the cheek to ask me what do I want! Me on my own field and farm. What do I want, eh! Look here, you've got my field and my barn, and you've chopped all my damned trees down for firewood, now you've gone and pulled my plough to pieces. And you ask me what do I want?'

They argued and cussed for half an hour.

The C.O. saw the humorous side. 'Fancy you saving old iron when the country is calling out for iron to make

munitions; I'm ashamed of you. We're here to protect your farm and this is the thanks we get.'

In the finish the old farmer went off muttering to himself and threatening to write to the Admiralty. Whether he did or not no one knows. The blacksmith's party was thoroughly recognized now and every morning when the duties were given out Smithy ran at the double to the little forge under the trees to wait until any little job, such as sharpening hooks for holding down the canvas sheds, or anything else that required heating up.

One night the whole camp was awakened by the chuffing of a steam engine, and most of the fellows got out of their hammocks to see what was the matter. It turned out to be two Foden steam wagons with trailers attached, on which were perched large aeroplane cases. The drivers were two petty officers who didn't care a damn for officers or men. They swore and cursed as they parked their wagons. Rochford was their base and they were sent to all parts of the country carting anything that different air stations required. Sometimes they were away for weeks at a time and when nobody wanted them they made Rochford their home. They just seemed to do as they pleased. They took orders from nobody as regards camp routine and it seemed nobody interfered with them. Even when an officer did have to speak to them he made it short and sweet or he got a nasty mouthful of language.

One Saturday afternoon a football match was arranged between the officers and men, and on these occasions the camp was open to ladies; the officers would invite their wives, or other men's wives, which ever the case might be, and they would stand and watch the match.

It happened on this afternoon that when the time for the

match to start arrived the officer who was to keep goal couldn't be found. The men were on the field in their respective places waiting to start, but still the goalkeeper was missing. Up came one of the steam wagon P.O.s.

'What's up? Why don't they start the blinking game?' he asked.

'Lieutenant Timson, the goalkeeper, is missing,' said someone.

'It don't matter about him, I'll take his place till he comes.'

He took off his jacket, displaying a torn and filthy shirt. He just looked as though he'd been pulled through the flues of his wagon, his face was covered with dirty oil and he hadn't had a shave for a week.

Dropping his coat at the foot of the goalpost he bellowed to the referee to blow his whistle, and the game started.

He cursed and swore at the officers on his side until the air was blue. All the ladies moved to the other end of the field, shocked to death. After the game had gone on for a quarter of an hour Mr. Timson arrived with two ladies, but when he saw the P.O. in goal he turned away, but not before the P.O., whose name we will call Crofts, spotted him. He shouted, 'Hi, Timy, you can come now, I'm goin'. I ain't goin' to stand in goal for these daft idiots any longer, they couldn't kick a balloon ner mind a football. Come on with you.' And with that he picked up his coat, or rather part of a coat, and went off towards his wagon to finish cleaning his flues.

The officer who was playing back turned to Lieutenant Timson and said: 'Who is that terrible fellow, Timson? He ought to be taught how to address an officer. Why don't you report him?' Timson replied that those fellows of the wagons

were best left alone. One shouldn't have anything to do with them. They wouldn't stop at anything to get their own back if you got them into trouble.

The following day the Foden wagons were ordered to go to Felixstowe. One of the mates fell sick. Whether he was sick bodily or just sick of the job nobody knew but himself, because there wasn't a doctor in the camp, and the C.O. had to take the man's word for it.

Nevertheless, another man had to be found to take his place, and a volunteer was asked for.

Smithy, who was always out for a change and was willing to try anything once, volunteered to go with them. The job was quite easy, in fact there was nothing to do but sit on the rear of the wagon as lookout man. They stopped here and there to fill up with water from a ditch and get a bag or two of coal on board now and then. At night they ran the wagon into a siding, washed and dressed themselves up and went out for the night. There was no roll call on that job, so long as the wagons were on the road early next morning that was good enough.

There was a certain sum allowed for lodgings, but they always slept in the aeroplane cases at the back. That meant more money for beer, etc. When they arrived at Felixstowe they were told that they had been such a long time coming that they had managed the job which they wanted them for, so the only thing to do was to return to Rochford to wait until somebody else wanted them.

This sort of thing happened several times whilst Smithy was with them, and it was quite fun until financial matters began to worry them.

The trouble was, that when pay day arrived, once a month at the base, the Foden crews were not there to draw their

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money, so it was sent back to London. Sometimes they happened to be on the job and get one month's money, that would last them for a while, but they would miss the next month's, and that would bump them back.

On one occasion they had stopped at a small public house in a little village about twenty miles from London. They were having dinner in the small parlour at the back, all of them grumbling about money and how they were going to pay for the meal if it happened to come to more than two shillings each.

'He'll have to wait for it,' said one of them.

At that minute the landlord came in to put some coal on the fire.

'Are you warm enough?' he asked. 'I'm sorry I can't make a big fire, because I can't get the coal. I've only got about half a hundredweight to last me for a fortnight. I don't know what we're going to do. And they won't let me have any more if I paid them double price for it, which I would be glad to do if they would let me.'

After he had gone out of the room Smithy jumped up and clapped his hands.

'There you are, my lucky lads. The problem of paying for the dinner is solved.'

'What the hell do you mean?' asked the P.O.

'Well, this landlord's got plenty of money, but he ain't got any coal, and we've got plenty of coal and no money. So why can't we swop over. Give him some of our coal for his dinner and a little cash as well if we can manage it.'

'Well I'm blowed,' said the P.O., 'and to think I've never thought of that before. Where is he?'

The landlord was a little windy at first, but he soon came to when they told him that they could just write out a ticket

and his own coal dealer would be bound to let them have a dozen bags if they wanted them.

The Fodens went off a little lighter than they arrived, and the men's pockets were a little heavier.

Needless to say that crew was never short of a meal when they had any coal tickets left.

Smithy was quite popular after his brain-wave, and more popular still when he saw another way of earning a bit of money.

They had been on the road for about two hours without seeing a vehicle of any description, when suddenly the Foden pulled up with a jerk, nearly throwing Smithy off the back.

There was a nasty bump and things came to a dead stop. Then the P.O. gave a little speech to the driver of a lorry that had come out of a side turning. He was nicely telling him what he thought of a man who came out of a side turning on to a main road.

The poor lorry driver didn't say a word until he saw the water pouring out of his radiator. Then he nearly cried.

'I've got to collect a load of furniture from an hotel and take it to York, and look at my rad. I'm done now, I shall have to telephone them and tell them I've had a smash and can't come.'

It was here that Smithy pulled the P.O. on one side.

'Ask him where he has got to go, then we can call and tell the people and perhaps wangle to get the job of moving the stuff. We are going to York, and we could bung the stuff in the cases and who would be any wiser?'

'Damn good idea,' answered the P.O.

The fellow told him where he'd got to pick up the stuff and was very pleased when the P.O. told him that he would call on his way and tell the landlord.

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It was night before the Fodens arrived at the hotel, and as they pulled into the yard a man came out and shouted that it was about time they'd arrived. But when he saw who it was he looked amazed and told them he'd been waiting two hours for a lorry that was coming from Colchester to remove some furniture for him and he had been let down.

The P.O. quickly explained to him about the smash, and the man nearly went mad. He rushed into the hotel and shouted for Rachel, who must have been his missus.

'You'd better let me handle this,' said Smithy to the P.O., and followed him into the house.

'Now look here mister, I don't know your name, but you've no need to go off your blinking head about getting your furniture shifted; if you'll listen to me I might find a way out.'

After he and Rachel had sat down Smithy began business by explaining the accident, and went on to say that owing to the Fodens being involved in the smash it was only fair to help him out with his stuff.

'But you see,' said Smithy, we are taking a big risk and it might mean forty days to us, but if you make it worth while we'll travel all night and get your stuff in York by morning.'

'You mean you'll take it for me,' he said, jumping up. His face lit up. 'I'll give you anything you like as long as you get it there by to-morrow.'

'It's done,' said Smithy to the P.O., handing him a bundle of notes, two of which went into Smithy's pocket before the P.O. handled them. 'Must have a bit extra for commission,' he thought.

The aeroplane cases were soon full of pianos and goodness knows what, and after a good supper, which cost them nothing, the long journey to York started. It was the first all-night journey they had made, but it was well paid for, and

when they arrived about dinner time the next day and unloaded the furniture the P.O. thought it wise to have a little breakdown before going any farther. Just long enough to make the correct time for the journey to be done during the day.

On several occasions they made a nice bit of money in this way, and when they did happen to be at the base on pay day it made them all a little flush.

The weeks went by and nothing particular happened, only that Smithy found that he couldn't get any leave on that job. But it didn't bother him much as he was having a good time and seeing the country.

One week they had nothing but trouble and rotten luck, which eventually ended Smithy's steam wagon career.

The first trouble began when they had two extra large areoplane cases, one on the wagon and the other on a trailer.

They were travelling through Ipswich and had to run through a number of very narrow streets, which were very busy at the time. The driver was skilfully threading his way through the traffic and was congratulating himself on getting through so easily, especially with the trailer and large cases.

He had just got through the town when a police officer put his hand up for them to stop.

The P.O., of course, didn't care a damn for anybody, let alone the policeman.

'What the hell do you want?' he asked.

'I want you, that's who I want.'

'Want me! What's the idea, can't you bloody well see we belong to the Navy and have got to deliver these aeroplanes up north by to-night?'

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'Now look here, you don't suppose you can come through a town and leave it in a wreck do you?'

'How do you mean, in a wreck?'

'Just you come back and have a look at the damage you have done, then you can see for yourself why I've pulled you up.'

With that they all left the wagon and followed the policeman back to the town.

'This is one of about a dozen you have smashed up,' he said, and pointed to a shop window sun blind.

'Christ,' said the P.O., 'have I done that?'

The blind was torn and the irons that held it were bent double. All the shopkeepers were out having a meeting over their blinds; there were about a dozen altogether.

'Well,' said the P.O., 'what are you going to do about it?' These aeroplanes are more important than your shutters; if it weren't for the likes of us the Jerrys would blow your shops down, ner mind your blinds.'

'It's not a bit of use arguing the toss,' said the policeman, 'I'll just take a few particulars and then you can get off.'

After that performance was over they were allowed to continue their journey.

'What will you do about it?' asked Smithy.

'Do about it? Nowt, of course. If they order me to bring a battleship through the streets I've got to do it, ain't I?'

For the remainder of the time that Smithy was with them nothing more was heard of the matter.

The next bit of bad luck happened a few days after.

They had passed through a small town that boasted a fine police station with fine pillars outside the entrance. On these pillars were fastened two lovely hanging lamps, which hung out a little too far.

As they went on through the town all the children were running after them, laughing and pointing, but that was nothing unusual as the kids did that in all the towns they passed through. On they went until they decided to pull up at the next pub for dinner.

The next pub happened to be a very large hotel, complete with doorman and footmen.

The P.O. pulled up in the drive.

'Hey you,' he shouted to the man in buttons at the entrance, 'come here.'

The man came over. 'Yes sir,' he said.

'What have you got for dinner?'

The man said, 'For lunch, sir?'

'No, you're daft, dinner, we've had our lunch and we want a good feed.'

The man rattled off what was on the menu.

'All right, we'll come in.'

'Will you want a wash, sir?'

'Wash be damned, I want summat to eat, and quick.'

'Very good, sir, first on the left is the dining-room.'

They all walked in, their overalls covered in grease, and their caps, which were once white topped, the same colour.

If the waiter felt surprised he didn't show it, and it was a good job for him that he didn't, as the P.O. wasn't in a very good humour.

One can imagine what they looked like sitting at a table covered with silver and cut glass, snow-white tablecloth, and serviettes.

The dinner was good and they were just wondering how they could square the manager for the dirt and grease that had come off their sleeves on to the edge of the tablecloth, when he walked up to the P.O.

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'Excuse me, gentlemen, but there's a police officer outside who wishes to speak to the driver.'

'Hell, what's up now?'

The bill was paid and they all walked out, the P.O. murmuring, 'Blimey, you needn't bother about the tablecloth, we've paid for a new one by the size of the bill'.

'Now what's up?' he asked, on seeing the policeman.

'I've had to leave my dinner to follow you chaps,' he said.

'Why, what have you followed us for?'

'Just come outside and look what's on the end of your case.'

They walked round and were surprised to see a large lamp hanging on the top of the case as though it had been fitted there. It was one of the police station lamps and had POLICE engraved on the bowl.

'Well I'm blowed,' said the P.O., 'how the hell has that got there?'

'You've knocked it off, that's how it got there,' said the policeman.

He didn't seem very pleased at having to leave his dinner and cycle ten miles.

'You don't suppose I knocked it off on purpose do you?'

'No, but why wasn't you more careful?'

'Now look here, you,' said the P.O., 'don't you know there's a war on and that police stations and policemen are no damn good now. What the hell you keep open for I don't know. There ain't no proper men going about now that get drunk and want to be locked up, they are all at war. And another thing, what do you want lamps for, 'you know damn well you ain't permitted to light 'em, on account of an air raid.'

'Now look here,' said the policeman, 'you'd better come along with me and tell the sergeant that.'

'What! Me come along with you. Why, for two pins I'd wring your blinking neck, and the sergeant's as well. The best thing you can do is to clear off. I've given you my name and rank and that's all you'll get. Hey, Smithy, get that lamp down and hang it round this chap's neck.'

While the arguing was going on Smithy had moved the policeman's cycle, which had been left against the wall, and leaned it against the side of the wagon.

'Struth, Smithy, I shouldn't do that, the chap is ratty enough now. Christ knows what he'll say when he gets an electric shock.'

'Serve him right. I wonder how much 'tricity he can stand. I'm dying to see how far he jumps.'

Now it was a funny thing how much electricity the engine accumulated with the vibration as it moved along the road. After a few miles running, if going at a good speed, it was impossible to put one foot on the ground and hold any metal part with the hand without getting the devil of a shock. After stopping for half an hour or more the electricity was still there. It couldn't run to earth, as the machine was on rubber tyres. Often they had a laugh when children touched the side and jumped in the air, then ran off screaming to their mothers, who came swearing and cursing at them as if it had been done on purpose.

The policeman finished filling his note-book with particulars, closed it, and put it into his pocket, with the remark: 'You'll hear a lot more about this business and get what's coming to you.'

'And you'll get what's coming to you too, mate,' murmured Smithy, 'and pretty quick too.'

All of a sudden the air was blue and the policeman was

rolling on the ground. 'I'll get you for that, you lot of sods; wait till I meet you at the station.'

'Why, what's the matter now?'

'What's the matter? If I knew who put those wires on my bike I'd break him in two.'

'What wires?' asked the P.O. 'There ain't any wires on your bike. What are you talking about?'

The policeman picked his helmet up, which had rolled off while he was on the ground. 'Well, I got a shock anyway, and it's connected with your wagon.' He looked round to see if there were any wires about, but couldn't find any. 'Ay, you've took 'em off, have you?' he said, turning to Smithy.

'I don't know what you're talking about,' said he.

Thinking the wires had been disconnected he had another go, but gingerly this time. 'Oh, hell, it's there again.'

'I can't feel anything,' said the P.O. as he grabbed hold of the bike, but with the seat first, then the metal handlebars after he shifted it off the wagon.

The policeman was still convinced that he'd been the victim of a joke.

'You've got the laugh now, but it will all go down on your bill, my lads,' and off he went carrying the lamp in his right hand and holding his machine with the other. One of the chaps sent him a nice raspberry to add to the insult.

Nothing was heard of the matter, for the simple reason that the complaint was handed on and on and on until by the time it got to the right party he put it down and forgot all about it.

The fellows got on very well together. Only on one occasion was there a bit of a bother, and that was when Smithy took a girl into one of the cases one night and lay

on another chap's bed with his muddy boots on, also squashing a pound of tomatoes which happened to be in between the blankets. But that was soon squared, Smithy offering to pay for them to be washed.

One exciting event happened whilst running through London. The two wagons were loaded with acetylene flares, which were being taken to an air station up north, and were well wrapped up with strong brown paper. They were travelling through a street busy with traffic, when all of a sudden the whole lot caught fire, due to a spark from the engine. Crowds gathered and all traffic was stopped. The fire engine arrived and very soon put it out. The only thing that bothered the chaps was that they'd have to find beds for the night as their own were wet through. Smithy stuck that job a little longer after that event, then began to feel a little fed up, the main reason being that there was no leave attached to it, so the next time the wagons returned to the base he put in for a change.

There were plenty of volunteers for the job, especially after Smithy had told the tale. He returned to the camp and another fellow took the job on, thus ending Smithy's career as steam Foden driver's mate. He got his job back as blacksmith and felt happier now that he could get a night off to go into Southend and a week-end to go home. One Saturday afternoon Smithy was walking along the parade at Southend, sticking his chest out and catching admiring glances from the girls, when all of a sudden the people around all made a rush for the houses. 'What the hell's up?' he thought, and wondered whether to run himself. An old lady bumped into him as she was making for a doorway. 'What's the matter?' asked Smithy. The old lady pointed out towards the sea. 'Look over there, the Zeppelins have

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got here and will blow us all up.' Here was a chance to show himself a hero. 'Why, that isn't a Zep, it's one of our own airships out for practice.'

Smithy didn't know the difference between a Zep and a balloon, but he'd heard that an airship would be cruising over Southend from the telephone operator on the station, and he guessed this must be it.

'Oh, thank God for that,' said the old lady, 'I thought the devils had got here already. You can come out, Lizzy,' she yelled to another woman who was peeping out of the bedroom window. 'This gentleman says it's one of ours, and he ought to know, 'cos he's an airman.'

'How does he know? Perhaps he's a Hun hisself and wants to see us all blowed up. You come on in, Emma, whilst yer got the chance, it's coming over this way.' Emma took her advice and shot off, giving Smithy a distrustful glance.

CHAPTER III

A WELSH RAREBIT

ONE morning another draft of men arrived at the camp, and Smithy, along with several others, was ordered to pack his kit and proceed to a little village on the east coast called Aldeburgh.

The air station was just being made when they arrived. Hedges and trees were pulled down to make the landing-ground.

'Looks as though we are going to be navvies instead of airmen,' said Smithy. For weeks and weeks the daily routine consisted of digging and eating and sleeping while the aerodrome was gradually forming. The men were all billeted out at the surrounding cottages for their meals, and slept in the barn and hay loft of the nearest farm. The only two structures on the aerodrome were two aeroplane cases. One was used as the stores and the other as a telephone cabin, in which men took watches night and day. What the devil they listened for nobody knew. The telephone rang several times at night and gave the report that a ship was passing such and such a point, also that the wind was changing. This was all written down and given to the C.O. next morning.

Smithy's idea was that it was all rot. What the hell did they want to know about crazy ships and wind for? They were civil engineers, not sailors.

Another thing he couldn't understand was that they had to dig to the bottom of the roots of the trees, then pull them

to the other side of the field, when there was a lorry on the station doing nothing.

'Why can't they put a rope round the tree and let the blasted lorry pull it?'

'That's easy explained,' said one of the 'navvies'. 'This station is only allowed so much petrol and what would the officers do for petrol to put in their cars when they go out at night with some of them judies, if we used it all on this job?'

'I could see as soon as they gave me these boots that I was going to do some navvying. You couldn't fly in them, the blasted machine wouldn't rise off the ground.'

'Garn, they gave us these to kick the Jerries' backsides with,' said another. In the evening the hammocks were slung and some lay down with a candle at their side reading, and some played cards, wrote letters, etc., until lights out, which was ten o'clock.

Sleep! Goodness they slept. It must have been the fresh air and hard work, for no sooner had the lights gone out than snore, snore, snore.

The chap who slept next to Smithy used to go to sleep with his pipe in his mouth, already filled for the next morning when he woke up. If it happened to drop out in the night and he was fast asleep he'd wake up and shuffle about, waking everybody up until he had found it, then he'd stick it into his mouth again and begin to snore like a man sawing iron. He was a clockmaker by trade, and he must have dreamt that he was one, because he sometimes altered his snore into a tick. When the alarm was rung to turn out in a hurry in the middle of the night he'd run out naked, all but his hat and pipe, and when he had a bath he'd always keep his hat on, and oh, didn't his baccy stink; many a night the

whole hayloft was awakened, thinking the hay had caught fire, but it was only old Fossek, as he was called, sitting up in his hammock enjoying his beloved pipe.

The fellow who slept on the other side was a Cockney and was supposed to be a painter, but they all thought he must have been a hawker with a donkey and barrow, because every morning about five o'clock he'd shout at the top of his voice: 'Hi, hi, wake up. Apples a pound plums. The donkey's dead an' I've sold the barrow an' I shan't be round to-morrow.'

He was a general nuisance, but a comical card. The C.O. asked him what his trade was and he said, 'I'm a de-cor-eator, sir'.

'Do you mean a decorator?' asked the C.O.

'Oh no, sir, I'm a de-cor-eator.'

'Well what's the difference between a decorator and a de-cor-eator?'

'Well you see, sir, a de-cor-eator gets a farthing an hour more than a decorator.'

'Oh, I see,' said the C.O., wondering whether to smile or not.

Every night after he had been to the village on short leave he had wonderful tales to tell of the beautiful girls he'd been with. It must have been beautiful beer he'd had, because the hayloft stank like a brewery when he came home.

The farmer had a daughter and it was usually a fight as to who should fetch the milk for morning cocoa; and the game-keeper at whose house Smithy went for meals had two daughters, but they hadn't reached the attractive age, and the father thanked his lucky stars that they hadn't.

The petty officer was a — well, according to Smithy, he

couldn't be described unless a whole page of this book was used for bad language. Needless to say, he and Smithy just didn't hit it.

He was a typical naval man, brute strength and ignorance sort, and he boasted a large nose which resembled a hook, and which looked as if it had been broken a few times. He had little narrow eyes and wore his hair cropped close, as though it had been done with horse shears. That describes him near enough in English.

Everybody, even the C.O., hated the sight of him, but he got himself into trouble and was sent away.

It happened that the road leading to the aerodrome was full of cart ruts, and on wet days it was impossible to get a motor along it, so it was decided to build a road of ashes and bricks. The bricks were fetched from the foreshore, where a number of houses stood, some of them in ruins. Every morning half a dozen men were sent in the lorry, the petty officer in charge, to fill the lorry with the bricks from the ruins. So many loads were fetched that all the ruined houses were used up, and they had about another half mile of road to make. It was here that mister petty officer put his foot in it. He told them to start to pull one of the good houses down, just because it happened to be empty. He, being a strong man, said: 'I'll start with the chimney stack,' and climbed on the roof. After he had knocked one or two bricks out, down came the lot, the chimney going through the roof. 'Now get on with it,' he said. They did get on with it, and in about a couple of hours the house was in ruins.

'Hey, what's going on here?' came a voice. The local policeman had arrived. 'Do you know you've pulled the mayor's house down? Who's in charge?'

'I am,' said the P.O., in his bullying tone.

'Then you're going to cop it,' said the policeman. 'What's your name and where do you belong?'

The P.O. gave him the necessary information and then cleared off. It took the wind out of him, and for a day or two he piped down.

Whether he got into serious trouble Smithy never knew, as he was moved from that station a week later.

It was at this station that Smithy saw his first aeroplane, and also had his first flight.

One morning the men were carrying on with the hedge pulling and road making, when a machine approached overhead. It seemed to act as though it was in trouble and was trying to make a landing. After circling round two or three times it came down, making a fairly good landing, considering the state of the aerodrome.

The C.O., who looked as though he hadn't seen a machine either, dashed about, shouting to the men to down tools and run after it, which they did in a hurry, anxious to get their first glimpse.

It happened that Smithy was first to get there, and was greeted with:

'Where the hell am I? What place do you call this?'

'Aldeburgh, sir,' he answered.

'Never heard of the place,' was the reply.

By this time the C.O. had arrived in a car, in style, complete with driver. The two officers exchanged greetings and the pilot asked who was the engineer. At that the C.O. looked vacant. He took all his staff for navvies and didn't seem to realize that there were qualified engineers amongst them.

'What's the matter with the machine?' spoke up Smithy.

The pilot turned and told him the sparking plugs wanted

cleaning and that the machine wanted filling up with petrol and oil.

'Do you want it done now?' asked the C.O.

'No, after lunch will do,' he said.

'Right. Smith, see that it's done.'

'Yes, sir.'

The machine was pulled into the hangar, which had just been erected and the men went off for their dinner.

Smithy hung back, and when they had all gone went across to the machine, wondering where the devil one put the petrol and oil, and said to himself: 'I must find out, because if I start putting the oil where the petrol ought to go I shall look daft.'

He opened every little door and tin cowl, then traced the pipes from the engine to the tanks. Satisfying himself on these points, he closed all the doors and proceeded to join the others at dinner.

On the afternoon parade the nice petty officer told several men off to carry on road making, the rest were to stand by to send the machine off. My word, didn't Smithy feel his feet, being able to go straight to the right doors to fill up with. He could hear the men asking each other: 'Where did Smithy get knowledge of aeroplanes from?' and 'How the hell does he know which are the right tanks?' By the way he went about the job anyone would have thought that he had lived amongst aeroplanes.

'All ready, sir,' he shouted to the pilot. And in another five minutes the machine was in the air.

The routine of this station was one evening off in three, and one week-end off in three. The evenings were not much use, unless one wanted to go as far as the village pub, there was nothing much else to attract the boys.

But the week-ends were all right. Those who lived near could get home, and those who didn't went into Lowestoft and Yarmouth.

One of the fellows had a motor cycle and sidecar, which he let out on hire. So much a day and find your own petrol. Some bought it, the others begged a small quantity or pinched it. Smithy didn't buy much, in fact he always said that it was a very bad habit to get into.

It was a regular sailor's cycle, and mostly bore traces of where it had been. Handkerchiefs, ribbons, hairpins, etc., were found in the sidecar.

On one occasion Smithy hired the outfit and was speeding along towards Yarmouth. He was just about to enter Lowestoft when the swing bridge was opening. Poor Smithy was going so fast that he couldn't pull up in time. The only thing to do was to speed up and jump the gap at the other side, which he did, knocking a policeman down who happened to be in the way. The policeman got up and cursed, asking Smithy if he thought he was in an aeroplane. Then out came the note-book.

But Smithy was saved by the sudden noise of gunfire coming from the direction of Yarmouth. Everybody was scared, wondering what was the matter. 'That's done it,' said Smithy, 'I've got a dispatch to deliver at Yarmouth and it's got something to do with that firing. I ought to have been there in time to stop it, but I've had trouble with this bike. That's why I was trying to make up for lost time.'

Whether the policeman thought he would get into trouble for detaining him he didn't know, but the man's attitude changed altogether, and before Smithy could realize what was the matter, he had cleared a way for him and told him to get off at once. He didn't have to tell him twice.

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'Phew,' gasped Smithy, 'that was a near thing,' and he got to his destination, where she was waiting in good time. And the pictures were good.

That same evening, as Smithy was going home, who should be on the bridge but the policeman. Up went his hand, and poor Smithy's heart sank. What a rotten ending to a perfect day.

'Did you get there in time?' asked the copper.

'Yes, but they chewed me up for being late and I didn't tell them you'd held me up.'

'I'm sorry you got into trouble. I would have held the bridge open if I'd known.'

'Oh, that's all right officer, it can't be helped.'

'What was it?' he asked.

'Only gun practice.'

'Oh I see. I guessed you'd got there all right, because the firing stopped soon after you'd gone.'

'Well, good night.'

'Good night, my lad, and be careful, the roads are dark nowadays.'

'Saved again,' murmured Smithy.

He arrived at camp without any further adventures, and the cycle bore no traces of the episode.

Each night six men were told off to do telephone duty. They took turns, each waking the other up after each watch. The men carried their hammocks into the hut and slept there overnight, returning to the barns next day to make room for the next lot.

On those nights that Smithy happened to be on duty they generally had a high supper.

Once Smithy decided to give the lads a treat by making some welsh rarebit. Before going on watch he went round

to each man for subscriptions towards the buying of butter, cheese, and onions, promising them all the feed of their lives. They all tipped up and Smithy went into the village for the ingredients, returning with enough to feed the camp, even after buying a packet of fags out of the proceeds.

‘When are you going to make it?’ they asked.

‘Well, it’s my first watch from seven to ten, so I will make it whilst I’m on duty if you chaps will keep out.’

He stoked the fire, which was a low cabin stove, then looked round for something to cook in. There was no frying pan or anything like one, so he decided to use the wash bowl, which was given a wipe out with one of the chap’s socks that happened to be hanging on a small line above the stove. It was impossible to wash it out as there was no water handy, and the telephone couldn’t possibly be left to look after itself.

Besides, who the hell was going to the other end of the aerodrome to the water cart when there was a drop of spit and a sock handy.

The cheese and butter were cut up and dropped into the bowl, which was placed over the fire, then the onions were thrown in. Soon the hut was filled with a delicious smell.

‘Smells good,’ said one of the men who poked his nose round the door to ask how it was going on.

‘It won’t be ready for another hour yet,’ said Smithy, ‘the onions will take a lot of doing.’

Soon it began to get dark, and the ships’ candles, which were the only means of lighting they had, were lit and stuck around the shelves, one being placed over the stove so that the cooking could be attended to. At that moment the telephone rang and Smithy took up the receiver. There was a long list of weather reports and ships passing, which all had

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to be written down on a form provided. Smithy was trying to make out the name of a ship by asking the chap at the other end to spell it, when he noticed the lighting go dim, but being so intent on writing took no notice. But alas, when he hung the receiver up ten minutes later and turned to give the welsh rarebit a stir, he saw the cause of the light going dim. There, floating on the top of the stew, was a long piece of wick with about half an inch of candle on the end, all that was left of a new candle.

'Blimy,' said Smithy to himself, 'what the hell shall I do?' and at once started to skim it out with a spoon. He soon got tired of sorting it out, and suddenly heard voices approaching. There was only one thing to do, and Smithy did it. He stirred the lot up, candle grease and all.

'Is it ready yet, Smithy?' they asked, bursting in.

'Crikes, it does smell good, I ain't had any before,' said one.

'No,' thought Smithy, 'and you won't want any more when you've had this.'

'Get your basins ready, my lads.' Five hungry men, each with a large basin, rolled up.

'Where's your basin, Smithy?' asked one.

'Oh, I've had mine ten minutes ago,' he said.

Splash, plonk, splash, it went into the basins. They couldn't wait until it was served out, but started troughing it straight off.

'Blimy, ain't it grand. Where did you learn to cook, Smithy?'

'Oh, we always had it at home on Saturday nights.'

One fellow had three basins full.

All was well until about midnight, then reaction began and the candle fat began to take effect. One fellow jumped

out of his hammock and rushed out of the door into the rain, returning five minutes later with the information that he just got there in time. Then came groans and belchings from the fellow who had had three helpings.

'Oh, I do feel bad. Fetch the doctor,' he cried. Then he made a grab for his hat and heaved his inside into it. 'That's better. It must have been that welsh rarebit.'

'You shouldn't have been such a pig,' was just all the sympathy he got. Four of them were running to the latrines all night. One of them it didn't affect in the least. The only solution he came to was that they weren't used to luxuries and could not stomach rich food.

'You must have lived on bread and dripping before you came here,' he said.

But the solution they came to about him was that the only reason he wasn't bad was that his blasted guts would digest shrapnel.

Then they began to query about Smithy. 'Why didn't he have any?'

'I bet he knew there was something wrong with it.'

'How could there be anything wrong with it? It was all good stuff that it was made of, wasn't it?' he argued.

After a day or two the matter was dropped, but Smithy daren't suggest any more high suppers. He kept the candle end for quite a long time, just as a souvenir.

CHAPTER IV

SMITHY'S FIRST FLIGHT

ONE morning a telephone message came through to inform the C.O. that he was to pick four men from among the engineers and send them to the Rolls-Royce works at Derby, where they would receive a course of instruction on the Rolls aircraft engine. Smithy happened to be one of the four and, together with the three others, went off the same day. On their arrival they encountered several more airmen, of various nationalities, including Greeks, Frenchmen, and Belgians; all were to receive a course of instruction.

Every morning at ten they received a lecture, and then walked round the workshops gathering information which would help them in the examination which was to be held at the end of the fortnight. All of them were boarded at a temperance hotel, which was kept by a dear old lady who looked upon them as her boys, helping them as best she could by letting them have a room to themselves with a blazing fire.

'Just so that you can study your notes quietly and without interruption,' she used to say.

Smithy caused her more anxiety than all the others put together. He never entered the room, and always rolled home in the early hours of the morning.

'I can't think where you go to, Mr. Smith. It can't be anywhere any good. Here's Jock and Dick, they don't go out at all, they have bought note-books and study hard until

bedtime. I don't know how you will get on when the examination comes. I'm sure your C.O. will be ashamed of you. Why don't you just stop in one night?' But despite the old lady's appeal Smithy didn't stop in. Not to study at any rate.

'Fancy stopping here swotting at a blasted note-book when I've found a nice little café where the tarts sit on your knee and feed you with a spoon till you can't take any more, and where you can go in the kitchen and cook what you fancy for supper. I know as much about damned aeroplane engines as I shall want to know for pulling up trees and making roads.

On one occasion Smithy did stop in, and that was only because he hadn't any money. He spent that night in a sing-song round the piano with the foreigners, one of whom was a very good pianist.

At last the dreaded examination morning arrived and they all sat down in the lecture room with pen and paper. The questions were written on a large blackboard and one had to write the answers without the aid of note-books. To avoid any twisting or copying, each man was numbered off, and the odd numbers wrote one set of questions and the even numbers another, so much time being allowed for each.

After the examination they all went home, after being told that the results would be made known at nine o'clock the following morning. The old lady met them at the door and gave Smithy a pitying look.

'I should think you're sorry now that you didn't study a little more,' she said.

'Oh, no,' answered Smithy, 'they only asked us a few questions and I've answered them, and I know my answers are right, so I'm not bothered in the least.'

'Huh, I don't know how you will be able to sleep to-night.'

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'Never mind, Mrs. Stone, perhaps I won't have to, because I'm going to a farewell party at the café and it will be on until morning.'

'Oh, you're hopeless,' she said, and shuffled off.

Smithy's party did last until early morning, and he arrived at the Rolls works with that I-don't-care-a-damn-whether-I-pass-or-not feeling.

They all sat in the lecture room and anxiously awaited the arrival of the examiner, who was to read out the results. He came in with the papers in his hand and a pleased look on his face, which looked a little hopeful.

'Now men,' he began, 'I am very pleased with this examination and am pleased to inform you that this class is the best I have had up to the present. Every one of you has passed' ('Thank God for that,' muttered Smithy, 'that will do the old girl one in the eye'). 'Of course, some of you have done better than others, so I will read the results and tell each man why he has lost certain marks.'

'The top of the list is Mr. Smith, who passes with 98 marks out of a possible 100. The reason that you didn't get full marks is that your papers were not kept tidy and were rather dirty.'

It was on the end of Smithy's tongue to tell him that he was an engineer, not a bank clerk, but he refrained from saying it by the pleasure of knowing that he was top. The rest of the names were read out and the lowest was 92, and he happened to be the fellow who had stopped in and studied the most.

Mrs. Stone was waiting at the door of her hotel. 'Well boys, how did you go on and who was top?'

'Smithy was top with 98 marks.'

'What!' she exclaimed. 'I don't believe it. There must

have been some mistake. I'll ask Mr. Lewis, the examiner, when he gets here.'

Mr. Lewis verified the statement, and the box of cigarettes which the old lady had for the winner was reluctantly handed over to Smithy, with the remark that he hadn't earned them in her way of looking at things. Over the tea table comments were given, and Smithy's comment was that if he happened to be in an aeroplane that came down with engine trouble in enemy territory, what good would clean tidy papers be to him; all he'd want would be a few spanners to repair the damn thing and get going again, before the Huns spotted him.

On arriving back at Aldeburgh the same routine went on, road making and pulling up trees.

'They ought to have sent me to Dartmoor not Derby, to have learnt to break stones,' said Smithy to the fellow working next to him.

'Don't worry, you'll get there soon enough,' was all the sympathy he got, because most of the fellows were jealous at four being given a rest while the others were kept navvying.

In another week or two the aerodrome was finished and declared fit for machines to land, much to the men's relief. Several machines landed, mostly to be filled up with petrol and oil. Machines in those days were different to those of the present day. The men who flew them took their lives in their hands every time they went up. On one occasion when a machine landed, the pilot told Smithy to fasten the exhaust pipe up as it had become loose. The whole machine was discovered to be tied up with string and wire just like one used to see old Ford cars tied up. Everything was loose, even the rigging.

'This machine looks in a bad way,' thought Smithy, as he

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proceeded to rewire the pipe. After a few minutes' talk with the C.O. the pilot returned.

'Well, have you done it?'

'Yes, sir. I've fastened the pipe, but half the oil pipes leak and will want re-soldering. The machine isn't safe to fly, as it is.'

'How the devil do you mean? "Isn't fit to fly!" It's brought me over from France and it's got to take me back when I've had a week's leave.'

'But it's not safe, sir,' persisted Smithy.

'Well, it will do for me,' he said, and climbed into the cockpit. 'Switch is off, give her a suck in.'

The propeller was turned a few times and after the order 'Switch is on' the engine sprang to life. With a smile and a wave he was off. By the sound of his talk he didn't care a damn so long as he got home.

With all due respect to the present-day record breakers it was the men who flew the machines at the beginning of the war who deserve the credit and honours, but didn't get much, and are forgotten years ago by most; but those who had any dealings at all with them will always respect and call them the real airmen, with real guts.

Smithy was by now the engineer with a capital E, and he got braver and more venturesome each day. But one little incident put him back one. It happened one morning. A machine landed with engine trouble, at any rate the pilot said it was.

'I cannot get the correct number of revolutions when the engine is full out,' he said. 'Will you test it for me whilst I get some lunch?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Smithy, anxious to sit in the cockpit with the engine running.

Wooden wedges called chocks were placed under the wheels as a rule when the engine was run full out, and two men hung on to the tail of the machine. But on this occasion nobody thought of the chocks, and Smithy climbed into the cockpit.

'Switch is off,' he called to one of his mates. 'Suck in.'

'Switch is off, suck in,' repeated the man and proceeded to swing the propeller round.

'Switch is on,' sang out Smithy, and the engine started with a roar.

It was here the trouble began. Smithy was so interested watching the needle of the rev. counter creeping up as he opened the throttle that he didn't notice that the machine was beginning to move.

The men holding it held on until they couldn't hold on any longer, so ran out of the way shouting, which of course couldn't be heard above the roar of the engine. All of a sudden Smithy looked up and to his horror saw himself rushing towards a hedge a few yards in front of him. Then there was a bang and a noise of splintering wood, and the machine came to a standstill.

'Christ, that's done it,' he said, as he surveyed the broken propeller. The pilot and C.O. rushed up and played hell, throwing all the blame on to the petty officer for not seeing that the chocks were put under the wheels. It soon died down and another propeller was sent for, the pilot pleased at not having to return until the next day.

Smithy's first flight came at last, and it was the talk of the station for many days after, as not many lower ratings had the chance to go up in those days. All the men were called out when a machine was sighted, in case it was going to make a landing. The machine overhead was flying round

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and round and seemed as though it didn't know whether to land or not, but at last the pilot made up his mind to land. When the men reached him he asked if this was a certain air station, and was informed that it wasn't the one he wanted, which was a few miles farther up the coast.

'I've been searching all over the damned place and I can't find it,' he said. 'Does anybody here know it?'

'I know it,' shouted Smithy. 'I've been there several times with the steam wagons.'

The C.O. had arrived by this time.

'Would you let this man come with me and show me which is the aerodrome?' the pilot asked the C.O. 'He says that he's been there several times.'

'Yes, certainly. Have you goggles and helmet, Smith?' he asked.

'No, sir, but I think I can get some off the lorry driver.'

'Make haste and get them then.'

Smithy wasn't told twice, and returned complete with helmet, goggles and leather coat in two ticks. Oh the envious looks he got as he climbed in front of the pilot! In another few minutes the machine was up in the air and all Smithy could hear was the rush of air and the noise of the engine. He tried to look over the side, but the pressure of air on his goggles hurt his nose so much that he quickly drew his head behind the little windscreen. After a minute or two he had another look, keeping his head turned away from the propeller. This time the draught of air drew all the air out of his lungs, so he decided to keep his head inside, unable to decide whether he liked flying or not. Then there was that sinking feeling in his tummy, reminding one of going down a lift too quickly, and all of a sudden going up again. By this time Smithy was beginning to wonder

whether the eggs would agree with the bacon that he had had that morning for breakfast. Suddenly he felt something kicking him under the seat and, turning round, was horrified to see the pilot holding both his hands up in the air laughing.

'Crikes,' said Smithy to himself, 'I wonder if the chap's gone daft,' and expected at any moment to find himself crashing.

Then another kick from behind. This time the pilot was pointing down and trying to ask him if that was the air station.

Smithy looked down but all he could see was a map of the country. Fields as big as a matchbox and roads like a piece of cotton. Then with more luck than judgment he saw a few sheds that looked like small tents standing in a field.

'Yes, that's it,' he shouted to the pilot, nodding his head at the same time. He didn't know whether it was the station or not, because it looked much different going to it by air than by road; anyway it turned out to be the right one, so that's all that mattered to Smithy.

The machine began to twist and turn, the map being first underneath, then on top. 'How the hell is he going to land in that small space?' thought Smithy. The pilot turned the nose of the machine down and it began to gather speed, then it turned on its side, and by that time poor Smithy was too dizzy to notice where he was or in what position. Down and down the machine went until the little sheds and the fields began to appear larger; then the machine became quiet and the rush of wind and roar of the engine stopped and at last they landed. The men in the air station came running towards them and finally wheeled the machine into the shed. They didn't recognize Smithy because of his

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rig, but when he took the goggles off there were a few exclamations of surprise.

'Blimey, look what's dropped from the air!' said one.

'How the hell did you click for this joy-ride, you lucky devil?'

'Oh, just influence, my lad, just influence,' answered Smithy.

First one began to ask questions, then another, until he was surrounded by men.

'What was it like? Was you sick? By gum I would have given five quid to have taken your place. I bet you want some clean pants.'

One old timer said, 'You can all fly as wants to, but give me one leg on the ground so as you can get out and walk if anything happens, you never knows when them things are going to crash'.

Another fellow asked him if he saw any angels up there.

'I wish he had,' said a chap at the back, whose voice Smithy seemed to recognize, 'and that they had invited him to a welsh rarebit supper.' It happened to be one of the fellows who had been on the Aldeburgh station but had been transferred to this one.

The return trip seemed a little better. Smithy had got more used to flying, so when they landed back home he stepped out as though he was stepping out of a car, without feeling dizzy.

The petty officer had it in for Smithy more than ever after that.

In fact it got so bad he decided on a scheme to get himself transferred to another station by feigning to have rheumatics. Reporting sick one morning he was taken in a lorry to the village doctor, who examined him and gave him

some stuff in a bottle to rub on the affected part and to report in two days again. The stuff in the bottle was poured away and the pains became worse, with the result Smithy got what he wanted, a transfer from that station, which was reputed very bad for persons inclined to suffer with that complaint.

The station that he was sent to was similar to the one he had left, only this one had a machine of its own with about two dozen men to nurse it.

It was here Smithy saw his first glimpse of war, in the shape of a Zeppelin raid.

One night a message came that a Zep had been sighted and was making towards that station. Every man turned out and the machine was ordered to go up. They had just wheeled it out of the shed when, 'Boom. Boom', the earth shook.

'Hurry up and start the engine,' said the C.O., 'and get the thing away.' But would it start! They swung and swung, the devil himself seemed in it, and by this time the Zep was overhead.

It remained overhead with its engines stopped, looking a wonderful sight in the moonlight.

'For God's sake don't start up yet, the blighters have switched their engines off and they'll hear our engine, and then let us have it proper,' said the C.O. in a soft tone.

It remained in that position for about ten minutes, and all the men lay down flat, wondering whether a bomb would hit them on the back of the neck. After what seemed hours, the Zep engines started again and moved off. All the men got up with a prayer on their lips and proceeded to start their machine, this time getting it to go with the first swing.

'He's got the safest place,' said one chap as the noise of

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the engine gradually died away. 'Now we've got to wait here until he comes back.'

'How do you know whether it's him or the Zep?' asked Smithy. 'We should look well, lighting the flares thinking it was him and then finding it was the Zep.'

'He fires a pistol which sends out a coloured light when he is a little way off. Then we light the flares for him to land.'

'Oh, I see,' said Smithy, walking towards the huts, where it was a little warmer.

Half an hour later the order was given to light flares, which consisted at that time of small bowls which were filled with paraffin and petrol and placed in a row across the field, a man standing by the side of each, throwing more paraffin on when required.

Smithy was one of these men, and he couldn't help thinking what a lovely target he'd make for a bloke in the Zep with a machine-gun if one did happen to be following their machine up.

The machine landed safely and the bowls of paraffin were turned upside down and stamped out, leaving the aerodrome in darkness again, and with a sigh of relief Smithy went back to his bed again, wishing the Huns were in hell.

Either the C.O. or the bloke above him must have had a brain wave, because one day they had to parade and were sorted out for special duty. The special duty was listening for Zeps. Each night two men were told off to stand at the end of the aerodrome facing the sea and listen. If he heard anything like an engine he was to report at once to the C.O. There were many false alarms, chaps thinking they could hear a Zep, and it turned out to be a motor car.

Poor Smithy tramped up and down the aerodrome shivering with the cold, thinking to himself what a fool he had

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been to chuck the steam wagon job where he could go to bed in peace and do as he liked. It seemed to him that each move he made was made for the worse. Still, it was no use moaning about it, he'd got to put up with it until the next move, which wasn't very long coming.

Orders came a few days after for Smithy to pack his belongings and proceed to a place called Howden.

'Howden? Where's Howden?' he asked the petty officer.

'Don't you know where Howden is? Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, my lad. Didn't you learn geography at your school, or was you brought up on a farm? Howden is in . . . let me see . . . blowed if I know now, but I think it's in Derbyshire.'

'No, P.O., it's in Yorkshire,' said a chap standing by.

'Oh ay, I knew it was some place with "shire" tacked on the end.'

CHAPTER V

THE POODLERS

AFTER the usual farewells to the other fellows, some soldiers' and some genuine, Smithy found himself bound for London. Here he was to take a train for the North. Nothing exciting happened on the upward journey until the train arrived at Nottingham, which happened to be Smithy's home town. This at once set him thinking. Why not get out here and catch a later train for Howden, he could give some excuse for the delay. One thing, the trains were not running normally as they did before the war, and that was in his favour.

Out he got and walked home with a funny feeling in his inside, as though a policeman or somebody was going to pounce on him all of a sudden and take him as a deserter. That feeling soon wore off when he arrived home among his relations and friends; in fact he forgot to go back that day, deciding that he would catch the early morning train. When he finally reached Howden and reported at the office he was greeted with:

'Where the hell have you been to? I've got a report that you left for here two days ago, and if you hadn't turned up to-day I was going to send a wire to ask where you'd got to.'

'Oh,' thought Smithy. 'You wasn't going to send a wire until to-night, wasn't you,' and decided to risk getting found out in a lie.

'Why, they knew that there weren't any trains to Howden last night, and I was told to get the first train I could, and that was this morning.'

'Where did you spend the night then?'

'I had to sleep in the waiting-room at Peterborough!'

'How long have you been in the air service, my lad?'

'About six months.'

'Well, look here. You ain't been in long enough to start swinging the lead, and don't try it on here or you'll get it in the neck. See? What did your mother say to you? I bet she was pleased to see you, wasn't she? Well, get out now and don't come it again. That's all.'

'Crikes, he must have been reading the diary that I don't keep,' thought Smithy. 'I shall have to be careful, they seem to know what you're going to do before you do it. Must be blinking thought readers.'

On looking round before dinner he began to wonder why they had picked on him, and him alone, to come to that place.

It was a fairly large station for airships. There were no aeroplanes. There were two large sheds for housing airships, properly built huts to sleep in, even an electric-power plant, which supplied electricity all over the station.

Things were done in style here. A bugle blew for different duties. After the afternoon parade all the men were assembled on the parade ground, which was called the quarter-deck, and the C.O. came along too. If there were any particular orders he read them out, then he told the men to fall out and double to their different jobs. Like this: 'Mr. Hancock's party fall out.' About a dozen or more would rush off at the double to the sheds. Then Mr. Shaw's party would double off to the power station, and so on until there were only a few left. These consisted of new men, or men that were good only for odd jobs, anyway, men that nobody wanted in their particular party. On this first parade of Smithy's he was one of the spare men.

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'Will you detail these men off,' said the C.O. to the second lieutenant, as though it was beneath him to have to bother.

'Very good, sir,' he answered.

There were about two dozen left, and he counted six. 'You go and clean all the windows in the huts and report to me when you've done them,' and off they went to the stores to get the necessary tackle.

'You six sweep all the grounds,' and off they doubled.

'You six go and help to wash the pots.'

Then the last six, which included Smithy.

'You six report to Mr. Lea for latrine party.'

'Well, the hell,' thought Smithy, 'so this is what I swotted up for at the Rolls-Royce works and came out top at that. I wouldn't be surprised if they made the bloke who came out bottom a blasted admiral. Latrine party! Hell, I'm damned if I'm going to do that.'

As they went past the huts Smithy's bootlace came untied, so he stopped to fasten it, leaving the other men to carry on; but by the time he'd fastened it and ran after the others they were out of sight.

'Well, I've got a good excuse if they miss me, because I don't know where the latrines are.' And with that he made for his hut.

There seemed to be plenty of men walking about, and others were lying on their beds reading. Nobody took any notice of him, so he lay on his bed and read a book until the tea bugle sounded. On the mess deck Smithy happened to sit next to one of the latrine party, who also recognized him.

'Where did you get to?' he asked.

'Why, the P.O. called me back and I had to go to the office. Did Mr. Lea ask where I was?'

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'No, oh no, he don't know how many men are going to be sent to him and they are always different each day.'

'That's that,' thought Smithy. 'They don't catch me on that party again.'

The following morning the same routine was carried out. Mr. Hancock's party was called out. The fellow next to Smithy shot off, so without any hesitation Smithy shot off and joined the crowd running towards the sheds. Then that horrible bootlace came untied again, leaving him no alternative but to go back to his hut again. There he found the usual men lying on their beds. One of them asked him if he was on the same game as them, poodling.

'What's that mean?' asked Smithy.

'Why, poodling is swinging the lead, or dodging work.'

'Yes, I am; I'm not going to clean the bloody lavatories out.'

'Don't blame you, mate. All you've got to do is to keep your eyes open for the P.O. coming. He comes round about half-past ten. You'll hear him going in the next hut. All you've got to do is to go out of that door as he comes in at the other one, then walk round to the other. Sort of follow him round.' This business was carried on for several weeks, in fact it got a little boring having nothing to do.

The only trouble was that each day the poodlers' party got larger, and at last the P.O. got the wire and decided on a raid one morning.

The poodlers were lying on their beds as usual, reading, and a game of nap was going on at one end of the room, when all of a sudden both the doors at each end of the hut were flung open at once, and in walked two petty officers.

'Stop where you are,' was the order.

Then the examination proceeded.

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'What's your name?' they asked the first man they came to.

'Thompson.'

'What are you doing here?'

'I'm on telephone duty and it's my watch off.'

'Right. Carry on.'

Then the next. Each man gave a good excuse, and by the time they got to Smithy all the excuses were already worn out.

'Who are you?' they asked Smithy. 'Don't seem to know your face.'

'No, I'm a new man, only arrived to-day and have got to report at the next parade.'

'Oh, carry on then,' and off they went.

About thirty men altogether got extra duty for a month, but Smithy was lucky and got away with his excuse.

After that day Smithy sought a better hide-out, and found a haystack at the end of the aerodrome, which was much healthier, for the mind as well as the body.

He got the wind up one day. He had just been to the canteen, a little hut which was filled with eating and smoking goods, run by the men themselves, all profits going into the concern.

'Air-mechanic Smith,' shouted a man with a writer's badge on his arm, denoting that he'd come from some official quarter.

Smithy turned.

'Are you Smith, No. 45270?'

'Yes, that's me. Who wants me?'

'You're wanted at the office at once.'

'Crikes,' said Smithy to himself, 'that's torn it. They have found me out at last. I thought I was going too strong.'

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On arriving at the main office he was given the order to face the C.O.

'Are you Air-mechanic Smith?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, I've sent for you to inform you that every man who comes to this station is expected to subscribe five shillings towards the canteen fund. The money will be refunded when the man leaves. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Have you got five shillings to pay with now, or shall I deduct it out of your next pay?'

'I'll pay it now, sir, then I shall be straight. Is there anything else to pay, because I will pay it now and get it finished with.'

The money was handed over, Smithy thinking he'd willingly have paid a quid at that moment.

'Right. Dismiss,' ordered the P.O.

Smithy didn't want telling twice and off he went to his beloved haystack.

There were times that he did have to work, and that was when an airship landed in the evening and every man had to be on the field to hang on to the ropes, which were flung out of the airship when it got low enough to the ground. Here Smithy learnt a wrinkle worth knowing about the landing of airships, much to his discomfort and nearly at the cost of his life.

When an airship was about to land, ropes were dropped from her and it was the duty of the men to make a rush for them and hang on. But sometimes the ship would begin to rise again and some of the men would let go, leaving the first few to hold it, which was of course impossible, with the result the men would be lifted off the ground

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before they knew what had happened and would find themselves several feet up. Losing their nerve, they would let go, and end with a nasty bump. Several fellows were hurt in this way, Smithy being one of them. He made a resolution ever after that to be the last bloke to get hold of the rope and let the other silly devils get there first, even if they did get praise for being smart men.

Eventually Smithy got sick of poodling and worked his way into the engineering shops, where all sorts of things were made, from souvenirs out of broken airship parts to cigarette lighters out of the raw material. The Chief in charge was an old Navy man, who was made fun of nearly every day as the result of how a job is done in the Navy compared to that done in a civilian workshop.

It is an old saying that you can learn something even from a fool, and this Navy man, whom everybody thought a fool, gave all the engine staff a surprise one day. It happened that one of the airships got a bullet hole right through its petrol tank, which was made of aluminium. The tank was taken out and the captain asked the chief what he was going to do about it.

'Oh, we shall take it into the workshop and solder it, or solder a patch on.'

When the other men heard this a snigger went round, as at that time it was considered impossible to solder aluminium.

The tank was carried into the workshops, and the chief assembled all the engineers.

'Now, you clever blighters, I heard you laugh when I told the captain that I would solder this tank. I know you all think that I'm a fool, so now's your chance. Is there any one among you that could do the job?'

Nobody answered.

'No. I thought not. But I'm going to do it, and I'm going to let you all see me do it. Then perhaps you will alter your views of me.'

The men crowded round and watched, and in about an hour the tank was finished and tested, ready for refitting into the ship.

'There you are, you clever lot of blighters. Now who is it that laughs?'

They all walked away with their tails between their legs and gave him a little more respect after that.

Smithy's time at Howden was brought to a close when he received orders one night to pack up his traps and catch a train to the Crystal Palace. Here he was to join a draft that had orders for foreign service. He was only given a few minutes notice before the train left, so he didn't get time to go round to the office for his canteen fund money back. Another queer feeling came into his tummy as he thought of foreign lands.

'Cannot I have some leave to go home and say good-bye to my folks?' he asked the officer.

'Oh, you needn't bother about that now,' he said, 'they will give you some when you get down there.'

Smithy thought by the rush and bother that the foreign draft was about to leave straight away, but on his arrival at the Crystal Palace he was informed that they were not going for a week or two.

The Palace proved to be the training ground for the R.N.A.S. and the R.N.V.R. During the day all one could see from the terrace was drill, and drill with a capital D. Thousands of men were running and waving their arms about to the shouts of their instructors, and sometimes to

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the tune from a band. Sheerness was bad enough, but this place looked as though it was going to be much worse for discipline.

The first thing Smithy had to go through was to be inoculated. He was lined up with a few more men who had just arrived from other stations and examined by the doctor. Then came the needle. They were informed that they would be excused drill for three days and were to sling their hammocks in a special room where they would not have to get up until eight o'clock in the morning. The others had to rise at six o'clock for physical drill.

'Physical drill at six, before breakfast,' thought Smithy, 'I'd sooner die.'

The three days of leisure soon came to an end; it was nice to hear the other fellows marching amidst the yells of the officers while he was in bed and during the day while walking round the beautiful grounds and lakes. It was on the fourth day that Smithy wondered whether to move his sleeping quarters or not. Nobody told him to go, or where to move to, so he decided to stop where he was.

The food was fairly good, only there wasn't too much of it. When you had finished what you'd got on your plate it was a case of get up and clear out, as it was no use asking for more. The job was done by a firm of caterers, and at each meal the food was served out on the plates, and the mess attendants saw to it that one man didn't get two plates. The men used to try to miss a chair and leave a vacant space, but that didn't often happen.

One morning there was sausage and chips laid out, and if there was anything Smithy liked it was sausage and chips. He soon finished his and looked round to see if any of the other fellows didn't like theirs. Sometimes one would leave

half of his meal, either because he didn't like it, or because he had been stuffing himself at the canteen or café, which were in the building.

No, there was nothing doing; poor Smithy got up and went out.

As he was proceeding to his hammock he noticed a queue of men standing at another entrance to the mess room.

'What's these chaps standing here for?' he asked.

'These are the late meals men who couldn't get to the first sitting owing to being on duty.'

'Oh,' said Smithy, 'I haven't had mine yet so I had better join the queue.'

Needless to say he was never short of grub after that. He was first in the queue for the first sitting and last for the second.

The days passed, and nobody took any notice of him. He got up at eight and went to the washhouse with towel, soap, and razor, spent half an hour there, then had breakfast; after that he lost himself either in the grounds or behind the statues, etc., that were put up in the corners. It was behind one of these statues that he first met his friend Middleton. It happened one afternoon that Smithy had bought a book and had walked to the back of a large case with the idea of settling down for the rest of the afternoon. He had just found a nice soft spot, when he heard a noise. Thinking it was a mouse or rat he thought nothing of it, and started to read his book. Then came a sneeze. That did it. Smithy got up at once and poked his head round the corner, there to discover another chap holding his handkerchief to his mouth trying to smother his second sneeze. Smithy guessing what this fellow was up to, showed himself.

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'Hello, what are you doing here, mate?' he asked.

'Same as you, by the looks of things.'

'How long have you been on this game?'

'Oh, about three weeks.'

'Damn good. My name's Middleton. I've been hoping I'd come up against some chap that I could work with. We can be no end of use to each other on this game.'

'In what way?' asked Smithy, and told him his name.

'Why, can't you see that we can go home for two or three days at a time and can answer each other's name. That is, say you go out to-night as though you were just going out for the ordinary night's leave. I can climb over the wall and come round to the front entrance at about ten and give your name. They don't know whether it's Smith or Middleton. Then you can stay out as long as you like. Then I'll go out and you do the same for me.'

'Yes,' answered Smithy. 'What if we are suddenly called to pack off?'

'That's easily got over. You leave me your address and I'll send you a telegram; then you can come back at once.'

'It sounds all right. We'll try it out to-night. What do you say?'

'Righto.'

The rest of the afternoon was spent in suggesting schemes.

That night Smithy went out of the front entrance, giving his name to the P.O. at the door, which was the usual procedure on going out for the evening; on returning the names were given to be checked off. That same evening at ten o'clock Middleton climbed over the wall farther up in the grounds, and came in at the front door.

'Air-mechanic Smith.'

SMITHY

'Right, carry on,' said the P.O.

Smithy had two days' leave, and on his return at night climbed over the wall.

This game went on for a quite long period, until one night after the lights-out bugle had sounded, the P.O., together with an officer, came round checking off all the hammocks that were not occupied. Smithy was lying in his, but Middleton's was slung up and lashed. The P.O. was at the other end of the room, and was occupied turning one of the unoccupied hammocks over to read out the man's name, while the officer wrote it down. The news soon buzzed round, so Smithy began to act, and act quickly. Luckily for him the room was in darkness, all but the light from the P.O.'s lantern, or they would have seen him unlash his mate's hammock and fling it on his own, covering it well over with the blankets.

Then they came past, Smithy heard the officer say:

'I'll soon put a stop to this business. Don't forget, Petty Officer. I want a full account of where the men were whose hammocks are not unlash.'

They passed, and Smithy gave a sigh, turned over, and went to sleep.

Smithy was very much down in the dumps the following morning, as he had arranged to go home that week and it so happened that it was officially Middleton's week-end off at the same time. They were sitting behind a large statue of some fellow on horseback. It might have been Henry VIII or Dick Turpin for all they cared. Smithy was looking up at the man's arm, which held a sword.

'I wonder who that bloke is?' he said.

'I don't know,' answered Middleton. 'It should tell you on the side.'

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Smithy went round to find out, and while doing so discovered that one of the boards at the base was loose. He pulled it open to see what was inside. It was hollow, the base was just like a box large enough to hold about four men.

He quickly went round to Middleton who was half asleep. 'Hey, I've got a brain wave.'

'Crikes, I thought you was the P.O. What's the matter?'

'I've found a place where we can hide our hammocks when we go off for a night or two.'

'Where?'

'Why, in the bottom of this statue; look, the bottom board is loose, and it's just big enough for me to crawl in with my hammock. See the idea?'

'That's one for the old man; he can go round with his lantern at night, but he won't find our hammocks.'

Men were moving their hammocks every day, going from one room to another, so nobody thought or said anything when Smithy shouldered his and went to the statue via a roundabout way.

The weeks went by and the foreign service men were coming from all stations, and the ranks grew. The C.O. and the rest of the officers seemed to hate the sight of them. They were called an idle lot of slouchers. Good for nothing, in fact they couldn't march properly, let alone drill. And as regards showing any respect for their superior officers, well, they just didn't know how; in fact, according to the C.O., the sooner they were on the boat the sooner he could drill discipline into the new recruits.

The foreign service men who were distinguished by wearing khaki were not given any drill, except physical drill in the early morning, and the rest of the day they were given

various duties, such as picking up paper and orange peel, and sweeping the floors of the Palace, in fact anything to keep them busy. When Smithy and his pal wanted to go out for the day they would go to the stores and order two sweeping brushes, then go to one of the tower gates, do a little sweeping, and when nobody was looking hide them and walk out one at a time. They returned in the evening just before tea time, and took the brushes to the stores. If there happened to be two men already detailed to do the sweeping, they walked up to them and told them that petty officer so-and-so had sent them to take over that job and that they had got to clean windows or anything that the pals could think of at the moment.

One morning on parade the name and number of Air-mechanic Smith was shouted out, and by a piece of luck he happened to be there.

'Here, sir,' answered Smithy.

'You are to report at the C.O.'s office at nine o'clock.'

'What for, sir?'

'You'll know when you get there, that's all.'

'Blimey,' said Middleton. 'What have you been doing? You ought to be ashamed of yourself doing things to get you in the C.O.'s report.'

Nine o'clock arrived all too soon and Smithy lined up outside the C.O.'s office, along with other men. Some were there for doing something they shouldn't have done, and some for requests for extension of leave, that is, to get permission to stop out until after ten. There were about a dozen waiting, with a P.O. in charge of the door outside, and another inside.

'Air-mechanic Jones,' someone shouted through the door.

'Air-mechanic Jones,' cried the P.O. outside.

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'Here, P.O.'

'Now, take your cap off and double to the C.O.'s desk. Then stand to attention while the charge is read out to you, and don't argue the point or you might get what's coming to you doubled.'

In Jones shot and the door slammed to. After a few minutes he came out looking down his nose.

'What did you get?' asked one of the men.

'Ten days confined to ship with extra duties.'

The next man was called, only he didn't have to take his hat off as his interview was only a request.

He came out looking pleased with himself and that gave the remainder a little hope, thinking that the bloke must be in a good mood or he wouldn't have granted a request.

The next chap came out between two armed guards.

'Damn,' said Smithy, 'where's he going?'

'He's going to clink for hitting a P.O. under the nose.'

'Blimey, what would you get if you hit the C.O. under the nose?'

'Shot!' was all the P.O. said.

It was a well-known fact that the C.O. was a bit on the fierce side and didn't show any mercy to the foreign draft men, but Smithy had not had cause to be introduced to that gentleman. However, when Air-mechanic Smith was called he got his first and not last introduction.

'Off cap,' said the P.O. inside, 'and stand to attention.'

'Air-mechanic Smith, you are charged with owing certain sums of money. What have you to say?'

Smithy looked at the P.O. and then at the C.O. and thought they had gone potty.

'Now then,' snapped the C.O. 'Do you admit owing the money?'

'Owing what money, sir? I don't understand what you are talking about.'

'Where is that letter, Petty Officer?'

'On your desk, sir.'

The papers were eventually found, and consisted of about four sheets covered with type.

'Hm,' said the C.O., 'I have a letter here from your last station, and they report that you did not return a pillow slip, value one shilling, and a spoon, value sixpence, to the stores when you left. They hold you responsible for them, making a total of one and sixpence. What are you going to do about it? Will you pay me now, or shall I stop it out of your next pay?'

'I'll pay now, sir,' said Smithy, glad to get off.

He was just about to hand over the money, when he suddenly remembered that they owed *him* some money.

'I've forgotten, sir. They owe me some money.'

'Oh, they do, do they! How much, and what for?'

'Well, it's like this, sir. When a man goes to Howden they stop five shillings out of his money for the canteen fund, and when he leaves it is supposed to be refunded.'

'So in that case they owe you three and six?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, I'll write them a letter to that effect and you will hear further.'

'On cap, right turn, double march,' and Smithy was outside.

Middleton was very anxious to learn what it was all about and whether it had any thing to do with their partnership.

The first lieutenant was a lawyer in civil life, and he didn't half practise his profession among the men. He was up to nearly all the schemes and mostly had a way to crab them. His gift of the tongue caught Smithy and, as he said

THE POODLERS

after, it was the only time he told the truth, and he got run in for it.

Middleton was in the scheme with him, and he told the lies and stuck to them, and got away with it.

It happened this way. The two pals had remained in the room where the inoculation party were supposed to sleep. The time allowed was a week, but the boys had already been there for six, getting all the privileges, such as lying in bed until eight and missing physical drill at six in the morning. They slung their towels over their shoulders and went to the wash house to make their morning ablutions, and on entering were confronted with none other than the first lieutenant.

'Come here, you two,' he said, leading them to a corner. Then out came a note-book. 'When were you inoculated?' he asked Smithy.

'Five days ago, sir.'

'Five days ago, eh! Are you quite sure of that? Because it has come to my knowledge that there are men sleeping in the inoculation ward who have no right there. Now, when did you say it was done?'

'Five days ago, sir.'

'Let me see, that would be Monday, wouldn't it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now, what's your name and number?'

'A. Smith. No. 45270.'

'Have you got anything on you to prove it, because I have frequently stopped men and they have given me the wrong name.'

Smithy pulled out a letter addressed to himself and handed it over.

'That will do. Now, look here, Smith, I'm going to give

SMITHY

you one last chance. If I find out, which I will, that you were not inoculated when you say you were it will be far worse for you than if you tell me the truth.'

Visions of grey walled prisons came in Smithy's mind and he decided to tell him the truth.

'Now then, what do you say? When was it?'

'About six weeks ago, sir.'

He nearly had a fit. 'What! Do you mean to tell me that you have been doing this for six weeks?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You will report at the C.O.'s office to-morrow morning at nine.'

Then Middleton's turn came. He asked him the same questions and the lieutenant gave him the same chances as Smithy had, but he stuck out that his name was Hopson and that he had been inoculated two days ago.

He was asked to produce evidence regarding his name and number but said he hadn't anything on him but would go and fetch a letter.

'No, you don't,' was the answer. 'You might not return.'

All particulars were written in the note-book, and off they went, warning one or two of the trap on their way.

'Smithy,' said Middleton, when they arrived at their room, 'I'm ashamed of you for letting a man like that get over you. I told you he's a lawyer by trade and nothing but a bluffer, pure bluff, that's all it is. I'll bet you he'll not find out about me. The barmy beggar told us that some other chaps gave him the wrong name and he never found them, so I'm damn sure he won't find me. I thought you'd got more sense. I'll bet you get two weeks for it.'

'Yes, and you'll get two years if he finds you,' was the answer.

CHAPTER VI

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

THE C.O. did a roaring trade that morning, altogether about twenty men were assembled outside his office, most of them defaulters. First one, then another, passed remarks, hoping that the bloke was in a sweet temper.

'Defaulters, 'Shun!' the petty officer sang out as the first lieutenant arrived to do his stuff. He beamed on them all with a satisfied look as though he had brought off a big lawsuit to his advantage. The names were read out and no one was missing. 'Off caps, quick march,' was the order, and in they went, coming to a standstill in front of the C.O.'s desk. Smithy was behind and did his best to hide behind the fellow in front, who must have stood over six feet.

He gave one glance over the assembly and then, without warning, he jumped on to his chair and then on to the top of his desk. He pointed at Smithy:

'Hello, you're here again, are you! I'm about fed up with seeing your face. Do you owe any money to anybody?'

Poor Smithy stood shivering in his shoes, and everybody turned to look at him.

The storm quietened down a little when he answered, 'No, sir,' but quickly rose again when he added, 'I never did owe any money.'

'Oh, never did owe any money eh! And what the devil do you think I have been corresponding all this week for?'

He opened a drawer and pulled out a handful of papers. 'Look! Look! Don't owe money, don't you! Well, let me

tell you that I keep a clerk doing nothing else but write letters about you and your money matters. You might be an admiral by the fuss they are making over you at the other station. Remember this, my man, you can't go about owing money in the senior service, and don't forget it!

After that he climbed down from his perch and there was peace.

'Now, Petty Officer, you may proceed.'

'These men were caught sleeping in the inoculation ward, when they had no right there after three days. They have also been absent at early morning drill.'

'You mean they slept in the ward so that they needn't get up until eight o'clock, thus dodging physical drill?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And who caught them?'

'The first lieutenant, sir.'

The lieutenant then began to inform the C.O. how he had outwitted them and finished with, 'There would have been more, only they gave me the wrong name and I was unable to find them'.

'Well, that's a snorter,' thought Smithy. 'The only time I've told the truth and get run for it. Wait until next time.'

'How long has this business been going on?'

'Some of them have been doing it for two months, sir.'

Smithy thought to himself, 'If they start sorting out, I've been on it the longest and he don't seem to like me, so I reckon I'm for it'.

His luck was in for once.

'You foreign draft men are a damn nuisance, and I shall be glad to see the back of you. You will all get ten days C.B. with extra duty. That's all, Petty Officer.'

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

'Ten days confined to barracks with extra duty,' sang out the P.O. 'Left turn, double march.'

As everyone was congratulating himself on getting off so lightly the door opened and the P.O. shouted: 'Air-mechanic Smith, come here.'

'What's the matter now?' he asked the P.O.

'You'll know soon enough, my lad, the bloke will tell you when you get inside.'

Poor Smithy was shoved inside with the usual 'Off cap'.

'No, Petty Officer, he's not a defaulter this time.'

'Right sir. On cap,' was the order.

'Now, Smith,' said the C.O., once more getting papers out of his drawer, 'I've settled all this money business, and when all is worked out I find you have twopence to your credit, which I will hand over to you when you've signed this receipt'.

The receipt signed, Smithy drew his twopence and was dismissed without any further remark.

Middleton met him with, 'I hear you've got ten days C.B.; and it serves you right; perhaps you'll have more sense next time'.

The sentence of confined to barracks and extra duties meant one had to report every night, and was found a job to do. If they couldn't find one they'd make one; for instance, the P.O. would see a pot of paint on the floor and kick it over, telling a man to clean it up, then he'd kick it over again, and so on, just to keep you busy.

'Well, Middleton, I'm going to have an easy day, so that I shan't be too tired to do my extra duties to-night. I have heard that there's a circus or something at the Olympia. Are you coming with me? We can work the sweeping dodge and I can get back for the defaulters' parade.'

SMITHY

The defaulters' bugle sounded at seven o'clock, and Smithy was back in good time after a pleasant day out.

He was told to report to the officers' mess.

There were about fifty officers in training, and they all had dinner at seven-thirty, and dined on the fat of the land. Smithy's duty was to help to carry the grub from the cookhouse to the mess deck; it consisted of fish, grills, and roasts, with sweets to finish up with; it was enough to make a man weep, after only having two sausages for dinner and rice pudding to finish with.

The officers' mess was two rooms above the cookhouse, and all the grub had to be carried through these rooms, which were in complete darkness save for a shaft of light from the cookhouse.

This was too much of a temptation for Smithy; when carrying a large dish piled with lemon soles he accidentally dropped one on to a plate that was lying on a near-by table, so that on the return journey he could do it a bit of good.

Then came a pile of cutlets, one of which was also dropped. Every dish that Smithy carried through he sampled, and by the time he had done he couldn't find room for anything else.

When the meal was finished he had the job of fetching all the dishes back, and was surprised to find some of everything left.

'Here is a chance to take old Middleton a feed, but the blighter don't deserve it, telling such lies to an officer,' said Smithy to himself.

One of each dish was put on one side until he had the chance to wrap them up.

Things were going on first rate until the snag came.

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

'There's always a snag in the best of things,' he thought, and when the P.O. set him on to wash the dishes he knew it had come.

Thousands of pots were heaped up and as fast as they were washed more came; it seemed as they were never to finish bringing the damn things in. Then came the knives and forks. Poor Smithy had used about two dozen tea towels and the one he was using was wet through.

'Hey, you,' screamed the P.O., 'you don't call these forks dry, do you? Look at 'em, every one you've supposed to have dried is still wet.' And without another word he emptied the lot back again into the water. 'Now try drying 'em proper, my lad.'

Poor Smithy could have cried, but he carried on doing one at a time properly.

The cook noticed him, and must have felt sorry for him, because he got hold of a towel and said: 'You'll never get 'em done to-night the rate you're going on; get hold of a lot in your hand and dry 'em like this.' Smithy watched him get through a dozen in no time, and got on a little faster after that. Up to the present time Smithy will help to dry pots, but hell and the devil himself couldn't get him to dry a knife or fork.

The job was through at last, and when the last fork was put away the chief cook fetched him into a corner of the cookhouse, and there was set a big supper fit for a king, even better than the officers had had.

'Come on, my lad, and eat, I've kept the best back, those beggars don't get the best cuts. I take good care of that. Dig in and let's see you eat.'

'Well, that's hard luck,' said Smithy to himself. 'Here I've been scrounging and wolfing it down when I could

SMITHY

have sat and had it in comfort.' Anyway he sat down again and did his best, which was very poor.

'Is that the best you can do?' asked the cook.

'Well, I went into the restaurant and had a feed before I came here.'

'Oh well, you'll know next time to come here empty.'

'Not half, I will.'

After saying good night to the cook, Smithy looked round for something to wrap up Middleton's grub in, but couldn't find any paper. But lying on a table was a sort of linen bag, which turned out to be the chef's hat. Into this the stuff went. There was no time to wrap them up separate, and he was sure Middleton wouldn't mind a bit of fish with his pudding. It all went down the same hole anyway; besides, he was lucky to get a pal who would think of him like that.

On arriving at his sleeping quarters, he found Middleton lying in his hammock, reading.

'Hello, Smithy, where the devil have you been to? I thought they'd put you in gaol. Anyhow, you look too pleased for that. What's on your mind?'

For answer, out came the bag from under Smithy's coat, and out came the first course, which was a lemon sole.

'This is good!' he exclaimed.

'I know it is, wait until you get the next course.'

Then out came two cutlets. 'Blimey, where did you get these from?' he asked between bites.

'Eat it up and then I'll tell you,' was the answer.

The pudding, which was a sort of trifle, was a little squashed in the corner of the hat, so it was handed over for Middy to scrape out with his fingers as best he could.

After the meal was finished and Middleton had licked his

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

fingers and wiped them on his shirt, Smithy told him the tale.

'So you see,' concluded Smithy, 'I didn't do so bad after all. It must be my reward for telling the truth.'

After lights out had been sounded and everybody seemed to be fast asleep, Smithy was awakened with a sock being wafted under his nose. He awakened with a start, and on seeing Middy in the act, said, 'Christ, I thought I was finishing up with cheese'.

'I've been thinking about that grub, Smithy, and I think I will come along and help you to wash up to-morrow night.'

'How the hell can you, you ain't doing time.'

'I know I'm not, but what's to stop me from reporting to the cook and telling him the first lieutenant had sent me.'

'Well, you can please yourself,' said Smithy. 'I certainly could do with a bit of help on those pots, especially the knives and forks.'

'Right. I'll come round to-morrow. Good night, Smithy.'

'Good night, Middy.'

The next night Middy turned up as planned, and the routine of the previous night began. The only difference being that the grub had to be carried round past one of the main doorways, where a sentry with fixed bayonet marched up and down. The two rooms were locked for some reason or other, perhaps they had found a chop or two on the floor and had guessed what had gone off. But in any case there was no need to pinch the officers' grub, as there was plenty waiting.

All the same, Smithy couldn't resist a taste of things as he went along, and the sentry looked so longingly at the piled-up dishes as they went past him.

SMITHY

The doorway was in semi-darkness, so when the cutlets came along Smithy told the sentry to take one off. Removing one of his gloves he grabbed one and marched to the end with it in his hand, there to devour it as quickly as he could before some officer came along.

He also had a fish and walked to the corner again. In fact everything that Smithy brought past him he grabbed a handful, even if it was a dixie of potatoes. Each time his hand dipped into the dixie without looking what it was.

It was when a pan of stewed apples and custard came along the trouble began. He dipped his hand in as usual and pulled out a handful of custard, shoving it into his mouth straight away, because he couldn't hold it until he got to his corner. But just at that moment one of his own officers came round the corner. He was a marine officer and could not bend for fear of splitting his trousers.

Smithy shot round the corner and watched what would happen.

The sentry bent down and started to sway, nearly dropping his rifle.

'What's the meaning of this?' asked the officer.

'I . . . I . . . f-feel bad, sir, and I've just been sick, I couldn't leave my post so I had to do it on the floor here, sir.'

'Why the devil didn't you call somebody? I'll send a relief to you at once, and you report to the sick bay straight away.'

'Yes sir. Thank you, sir.'

The officer went off, and Smithy poked his head round the corner and saw the coast was clear. 'Have some more of this, mate; it will take the sickness off.'

'What do you think of that, eh! You can't get over a marine, and it takes a marine to get over a marine.'

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

'Ay, it seems like it,' answered Smithy, shooting off.

When the pot-washing time arrived Smithy decided to do the washing and let Middleton do the drying. It was easy to turn the tap on them and most of them were quite clean. Noticing a lot of clean ones, Middy said, 'I bet some of them officers never had such good meals before in their lives, they must have been licking their plates same as our baby does at home'.

'You're jealous, Middy, just because you ain't an officer.'

'Jealous, be damned.'

Middleton was getting on first class with his drying and was keeping up with the washing.

'Where did you learn to wash pots?' asked Smithy.

'Why, didn't you know? We keep a fish and chip shop at home, or rather it keeps us, and every night I wash the plates. Sometimes on a Friday night we get a hundred customers wanting fish, peas, and chips, and the posh folks always want them on separate plates.'

'Do they have separate knives and forks as well?' asked Smithy.

'No, we used to give them separate ones, only we got so many pinched, they used to give us back one lot and pinch the others and swear blind they'd only had one lot of cutlery.'

'They must have been posh to do that,' sneered Smithy.

'Now then, my lads, how are you getting on with the dishes? Your supper's waiting for you.'

'Two more minutes, cooky!'

My, didn't they enjoy their suppers! They even had things the officers didn't get, in the way of jellies, etc.

'I was going to give them some jelly and stuff, but I ain't so well pleased with the first lieutenant.'

SMITHY

'Why, what's he been doing to you, cooky?'

'Well, he came in here just before you came and played up hell because I hadn't got my chef's hat on. I told him I'd lost it and my other was too dirty, but he told me he'd report me if I didn't get one before to-morrow dinner time. I can't think where the damn thing has got to.'

Smithy looked at Middy and winked one eye.

When they got to their room Middy drew the hat out of his coat, and it was filled with grub.

'What the hell did you want to pinch that for?' asked Smithy.

'Why, I wasn't taking any chances as regards that supper. I should have looked well if after doing all that work the supper didn't come off.'

'Why, man, you've got enough for a regiment there. What are you going to do with it all?'

'Well, to tell you the truth, I've made a bargain with that marine bloke who keeps sentry on the door. I told him if he'd let me in at five in the morning I'd get him a good supper. You see, I've got a date with a bird.'

'He ain't got a starving horse that wants feeding, has he?' asked Smithy, looking at the bulging parcel.

'He's long enough to get this down him without choking,' said Middy, as he moved off with his spoil, or rather bribe.

The end of the punishment soon came to an end, and Smithy was getting a little fed up and longing to get an evening off with his mate.

Middleton was supposed to be a dandy among the ladies, and boasted to himself that he could pick winners every time and that they all fell for him.

He made arrangements one night to meet two girls and

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asked Smithy to go with him to help him out, so they decided to shed their khaki uniform and put on their best navy suit, which was called the No. 1, and had to be bought at the owner's expense.

Both Smithy and Middleton had had theirs made in Southend, and had had them made to their own ideas, disregarding all naval regulations, which were supposed to be strictly adhered to.

It took them hours to make themselves up, and when the parade party for evening leave assembled they were first in the ranks.

Then came the inspection. The petty officer walked down the ranks; he stopped dead when he saw the pair.

'You two remain here,' he said; 'the rest, right turn, carry on.'

'Follow me,' he said, when the others had gone, and made straight towards the C.O.'s office.

'Crikes, what's up now?' said Smithy.

'God knows,' answered Middy, 'I wish we'd gone right over the wall now, we should have missed this at any rate.'

'Halt. Wait outside,' was the command.

In he went, and came out a little later with the C.O.

He also stopped dead at the sight of them. When he'd recovered he walked round and round them about three times. Then he spoke.

Taking Smithy first, he said: 'What the devil do you think you are? A Piccadilly tart? Where did you get that suit, from a stage property man? And those boots? You forgot to tell them to put high heels on them. The stations that you came from must have been homes for lost sailors, letting you go about like that. Turned up trousers! Never

heard of them. A nice little pocket in your jacket for a lace hanky, I suppose?

'And what have you got on your feet? Dancing pumps by the look of 'em. A winged collar, eh! You wouldn't like to borrow my epaulets and a sword, would you? And you,' he said, turning sharply to Middy, 'you look a real fancy boy with your nipped-in waist. Have you got any spats to lend him, Petty Officer? I've heard of naval men being mistaken for railway officials and doorkeepers, now that I've seen you two I can very well understand why.'

'Well, I cannot punish you, as it is not altogether your fault. It is the officers in charge of the station where you came from that are to blame for letting you go about like that, so the best thing you can do is to get into something that is uniform and then report back to me, and I will decide whether you may go out or not.'

'Right turn, dismiss.'

'Blimey', said Middy, 'talk about chewing anybody up. I reckon we've been chewed, swallerd, and spewed up again. I resent being called a nancy and for two pins I would have punched him on the nose.'

'Why didn't you?' asked Smithy.

'I thought about that shooting at dawn business.'

'Well, it looks as though it's finished our night. It's too late to meet those birds now, so we might as well go and get a game at billiards if the tables are empty.'

After changing back into khaki and presenting themselves to the C.O. they spent the evening in barracks, consoling themselves with what they would like to do, or would do, to the C.O. and the petty officer. 'Wait till I go on that swell mess job again, I'll spit in the blasted custard,' said Middy.

THE COOKHOUSE DOOR

'Perhaps he don't eat custard,' said Smithy, 'and if he does a little spit wouldn't hurt him. You want to put some poison in his morning cup of tea or a dose of jalap.'

The order to prepare to leave for foreign service came at last, and as luck would have it both the pals were at the barracks. They were to catch the boat in the morning. Nobody knew where to. That evening was a gala night. A band played in the Palace, and men and officers danced round the bandstand with their wives and sweethearts. Smithy stood watching, a little downhearted; every one tried to look cheerful, but it was an effort.

To wind up the programme they played the Destiny waltz, and to this day, when that waltz is played, memories of that night come back to Smithy of weeping children and wives who tried to look cheerful but failed miserably.

CHAPTER VII

SAILING ORDERS

ON arrival at Plymouth all the men were lined up on the quay side and counted. One was missing, and all names had to be read out and answered until they discovered the name of the missing man. They were taken in a small boat to the steamer, which was a mail boat and was bound for Malta. The quarters were down in the ship's hold and made suitable for messing as well as sleeping. Hooks were fixed for slinging the hammocks up, and wooden benches were fitted for the tables.

When all of them were on board the bugle sounded for dinner, and goodness knows the poor devils were ready for it, as they hadn't had anything to eat from ten o'clock the previous day. Those who had some money had got a snack at the station, but most of them were broke.

The bugle didn't have to sound twice. There was a rush to the tables and dinner was brought in.

There was no time for talking. They were all too busy eating, too busy to notice that the boat had began to move; and soon it began to roll. First one man dropped his knife and fork and bolted up the steps to the deck to throw his dinner overboard. When he'd gone the remainder made a grab for the remains of his dinner. Then another would go, and so on, until only the good sailors remained. Sometimes the poor devil wouldn't have time to get up the steps, which were very steep, and spewed all over them. All the sympathy he'd get would be: 'Save it until you get outside, you dirty blighter.'

SAILING ORDERS

Smithy was among the first to go, and he stopped hanging over the rails for hours, heaving his heart up.

The rails were full, and if the wind was blowing one got the dinner of the chap who was higher up all over one's face. But they were too bad to bother about that. To make matters worse, there was nowhere to lie down, as nobody was allowed to sling his hammock until seven o'clock in the evening, so all they could do was to drop on the deck in the warmest place they could find. The doctor and sick bay stewards were kept busy all day, but only the worst cases were attended to. When Smithy reported to the sick bay he was asked if his heart had come up yet and if it hadn't he was all right. Several lost their false teeth, some lost them overboard and some dropped them into the bottom of their kitbag, hoping to get some more for nothing or to get sent back to England.

At last the long waited for order, 'Sling hammocks', was given, and the men dragged their hammocks out as best they could, helping each other to lift them on to the hooks. Every now and then, while a man was making his bed, he'd make a dash for the deck, returning a few minutes after to have another attempt to get his boots off, but before he managed to pull his sock off he'd have to dash off again.

In a short time the deck was covered with spew, and it was slushing about as the ship rolled; if a man was unlucky enough to drop a blanket on the floor it was not fit to use until washed.

Poor old Smithy was too bad to undress, he managed to get his hammock up and unlashed, and after one or two rushes on deck managed to scramble in. Once he was in nothing mattered, if the boat had been torpedoed he wouldn't have got out of that hammock. But there was no sleep for

him that night; what with the heat and the stink sleep was impossible.

The sickness lasted for about three days and then Smithy began to feel himself again. He passed his three days lying on the top of the grating where the boilers were. Middleton found that spot and stopped there all night as well. 'It's better sleeping here getting starved to death with the cold than going down there getting gassed,' he said.

As Smithy was lying on his back he often wondered how the chap in the crow's nest felt, swaying about up at the top of the mast.

The pals took it in turn to go down to the mess deck to fetch some food. They daren't leave the place for fear of somebody pinching it. A few dry biscuits were all they could stomach at first, but after a while they could tackle a meal.

Everyone had to wear a lifebelt all day and have one handy at night, also each man was told off to certain boat stations. Smithy's boat got smashed to pieces one night, so his party had a raft allotted to them. 'Crikes,' said Smithy, 'I hope I don't have to float about all night on that damn thing.' Despite several alarms, nothing happened as regards getting torpedoed. For precautions' sake no one was allowed to smoke on deck, and all portholes were darkened at night.

One night several men were playing at cards in the engine-room gangway. It was the only warm place they could find. It was a bit of a nuisance having people wanting to pass every few minutes, and Smithy was not in the best of spirits, having lost nearly all of the bit of money he possessed. So when a fellow came and wanted to pass through a doorway that he was leaning against, Smithy looked up and saw the man was covered in oil and grease, and wasn't wearing a shirt, but

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just a dirty pair of trousers. Thinking he was only a common stoker Smithy told him to wait until he'd finished that hand.

'Are you going to shift, or shall I have you moved?' the fellow said. He looked very angry, so Smithy thought he'd better move, and did so, resuming his position when the door had closed.

Half an hour after Smithy learnt a lesson that he never forgot, and that was to never judge a man by his appearance.

The man who had gone through that doorway covered from head to foot in grease came out with a pair of cream flannel trousers on, and his jacket covered with gold braid. He just happened to be the Engineer Commander. On seeing him, they all dropped their cards and stood to attention.

'Why didn't you get up as quick as that when I wanted to go in?' he asked.

'Well, sir, I'd no idea who you was.'

'I understand. Carry on,' was all he said.

By the time they arrived at Marseilles everyone felt quite fit and was ready to go ashore if possible. But orders were given that nobody was to leave the ship, and to enforce that order sentries were stationed at the foot of the gangway.

The bugle sounded for a general parade and every man paraded on deck. Orders were given that there were several thousand bags of mail to discharge and several more to load. If it were done in a certain time each man would receive a double ration of rum. This sounded very generous, but considering the rum that they had saved during the time the men were too ill to drink it, not so generous as it sounded.

'Crikey', said Middleton, 'I should like to go ashore and see what Marseilles looks like; I wonder if we could work it. I know for a cert that we don't sail until to-morrow morning,

because I asked the purser and he said it would take us at least six hours to get through the mail carrying business.'

'Now then,' said the petty officer, 'each man will take a stick and pick up a mail bag, and on going up the gangway will give the stick to the man at the bottom.' That is the way each bag was checked, thus avoiding a mistake in the counting.

'Well, we will get ashore,' said Smithy, 'at least on the quayside, even if we don't get outside.'

The mail bags were picked up and the procession started, all the men trying to pick out the lightest. There was a great stack, and the stack didn't seem to get any smaller, despite the number of men on the job. After Smithy had carried three he went down for the fourth and found Middleton sitting down wiping his forehead.

'Blast this game, Smithy,' he said. 'Talk about working your passage. This ain't in it.'

'What about doing a bunk? We can easily dodge round that heap at the back and pretend that we are going to see a man about a dog. Then if nobody sees us we can nip round those sheds.'

'Righto, I'm on, when do we go?'

'Now, while that P.O.'s talking. Come on. Blimey, that's torn it. Look at those policemen at the gate. They'll want to know where we are going and why.'

'Oh, blast them,' said Middy, 'I'll tell them the tale. You didn't know I could speak French, did you?'

'No, I didn't, but here's your chance to do your stuff.' One policeman began jabbering and making signs with his hands.

'What's he say?' said Smithy.

'God knows,' answered Middy. 'He's speaking Chinese,

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not French. But that bit I can make out he wants to see our passports.'

'Oh, that's easy done. Show him your pay book, he won't know the difference.' The passbooks, as they called them, were examined, and two more policemen came up and tried to read them upside down, then made some remark at which they all seemed to agree, and finally they were allowed to pass through with smiles, that was because they were enjoying the cigarette Middy gave them.

The first thing they decided to do was find a restaurant and get something to eat. One was soon found and a chap at the door bowed them to their seats.

After studying the menu, Middy decided that he couldn't read French, as it was printed different there than in his book at home.

'Good job you admit it,' said Smithy, 'or else we might have been served with snails instead of what we wanted. I'm going to have some poached eggs, you can tell what you're eating then.'

'That's that,' said Middy, getting up after the meal, 'now let's go and find a dirty postcard shop.'

They found several shops, but the postcards shown in the windows were no better than the ones you see in England.

'I wonder where they get them from. I'm going in to ask, they can't eat me.' They both went inside a likely shop and Middy began to practise his French. After he had done a bit of spluttering the woman behind the counter said: 'You mean you want to see some naughty postcards,' in perfect English.

'Yes,' said Middy, looking like a fish. 'Yes, please.'

'Will you go through into the parlour and I'll bring you some. You see, we don't like to show them in the window.'

Into the parlour they went and soon the woman brought a pile.

My, weren't they good! It took them an hour to sort out what they wanted; they were all so good it was hard to choose.

They bought a dozen and pinched a dozen, Middy remarking 'we might as well have some for nowt, 'cause they charge us enough. I gave that café bloke a quid note and I've no idea how much he gave me change. It looks as though I'm a millionaire by the pocketful of notes I've got. But I bet she'll take half of them.'

'Where did you get your quid note from?' asked Smithy. 'I thought you were broke.'

'Well, I was, until I sold one of the stokers a pair of boots and a blanket.'

'They weren't mine, were they, by any chance?' asked Smithy.

'I don't know whose they were, but they wasn't mine or yours,' was the answer.

The lady came and sorted out how much she wanted from a handful of small notes, which she told them were francs, and the boys departed.

After walking along a sort of boulevard they met a soldier belonging to the A.S.C.

'Hello maties,' he said. 'Where are you from?'

'Oh, just having a look round before we sail to-morrow.'

'Well, you won't see much walking along here. Why don't you go down the Rag?'

'Down the Rag, what's that?' asked Middy.

'Where all the tarts hang out,' was the answer.

'Is it far?'

'No, only down to the right of that church. Come with

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me, I'll take you.' All three proceeded down the street and turned into another one, very narrow and dirty looking.

As they walked down this street several girls appeared at the windows and doorways, passing inviting remarks, and soon it seemed like a market with every tradesman shouting the quality of his goods.

Several ran out and caught hold of their arms.

'Watch they don't pinch your hat,' said the soldier. 'If they do, you'll have to go after them into the house to get it back.'

Things were getting too hot for Smithy and he began to blush. The girls quickly noticed and seemed to fix on him, showing their bare limbs to the best advantage.

'If you want a girl I'll show you a good 'un. I spent last night with her and she only charged me five francs and it was well worth twenty. There she is, standing on that step. Ain't she grand?'

The girl recognized the soldier and came running towards them, thinking he had brought some more customers. She was certainly beautiful, and had very little paint on, but Smithy was disgusted with the atmosphere and hurried on.

'Let's get out of this,' he said; 'it makes me sick. Just look at that old hag over there. I bet she won't see sixty again, and dressed like a girl of sixteen.'

'Remember the old fiddle proverb. Our sergeant-major always picks on them sort and likes 'em better than the young 'uns,' said the soldier.

At last, to Smithy's relief, they turned out of the street. 'Thank God for a breath of pure air,' he said, as he breathed heavily.

By the time they had said good-bye to their soldier friend and got to the dockyard gates it was getting well on in the

evening, and as luck would have it they found the same man on duty there.

He asked them what they had been doing and if they had got anything in their pockets that ought not to be there. Middy pulled out his naughty postcards and showed them to him. That did it. He roared with laughter, patted them on the back, and told them to pass through.

Arriving on the quayside, they found it clear, all but a dozen mailbags which were rapidly being taken up. Snatching hold of one each, the two pals staggered up the gangway as though they had been on the job all the afternoon.

'That's the last,' said Smithy to the petty officer, 'and a good job too.'

'Yes, you've done well,' answered that individual, 'and the C.O. is going to stand you all a drink of beer besides double rations of rum.'

During the evening, after the rations of rum had been dished out, the men began to get a little merry, and Middleton took that opportunity to display his postcards. A crowd soon gathered round, and a small auction sale began. Everybody wanted to buy them and they were sold to the highest bidder. Smithy's lot went the same way.

'Attention!' Everybody was silent. In came the C.O.

'What's all this noise about? Find out what it is, Petty Officer.'

He caught sight of the postcards on one of the tables and picked them up. Then he asked Smithy whose they were and how did he get them.

The C.O. had come over to his side. 'Are these yours?' he asked, looking at Smithy.

'No sir. Yes sir. I mean to say they were mine, but I've just sold them to the highest bidders.'

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'Oh, so that's what all the noise was about.'

'Yes, sir.'

'By the way, where did you get these and when? He had spotted the envelope that they were put in, and the name of the shop and street was plainly printed in English.

'I bought them off a fellow that was on the quayside whilst we were loading the mails.'

'You're sure you didn't go and buy them in Marseilles yourself?'

'Oh, no, sir. I've no idea where the street is. I've never seen France before.' After another good look at them all, he put them down with the command:

'Carry on, only don't make so much noise.'

The profits amounted to thirty shillings, and if they had known they could have sold a dozen lots.

By daybreak next morning the boat was well on the way towards Malta, and the weather was getting warmer each knot they travelled.

When the boat finally wormed its nose through the harbour and dropped anchor, they were surrounded with small boats loaded with fruit, etc. After the money had been dropped into their boat they handed the stuff up in a net fastened on the end of a long pole. But they took good care that they had the money first.

There were also small boys who dived off their frail craft for money thrown into the sea. But they only dived for silver, a penny wasn't worth getting wet for in their estimation.

Some of the men wrapped halfpennies in silver paper to bluff them, and didn't they curse and swear when they came to the surface after diving for them.

The men were then taken ashore in small pontoons and

marched to a camp, there to await until another boat came to carry them farther, the destination not yet being known. They were allowed to go out in the evening, but nothing worth recording happened on this visit, the exciting times happened on the return visit, nearly three years later.

They were only there two days, and then boarded a boat bound for Mudros, a Greek island in the eastern Mediterranean, or better known as the Grecian Archipelago.

It was considered a dangerous journey, on account of submarines, but they got to their destination without a mishap.

'My God,' said Middy. 'What a God forsaken hole this is. I wonder how the hell they found this place?'

Everywhere looked bare and bleak, everything dried up with the sun, not a tree or shrub to beautify the hill or mountain sides which towered up at the back of the camp, or headquarters, as it was called.

They were landed at a small pier which had been constructed by British forces, and were greeted by hundreds of men who had crowded at the pier head to see if any of their friends had arrived on the ship.

The first meal they received was bully beef and biscuits, and the men amused themselves by knocking the biscuits on the table to watch little beetles come out of the holes. This added to the reception, and to make them a little more cheerful they were told that there was no chance of any leave, in fact some of them had been there since the war started and hadn't had any.

'Your only chance of getting leave here is by getting blown up during an air raid or getting fever,' was the cheerful remark of one. But it turned out that all the men who had arrived that day were to be drafted to various

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air stations, which were situated on the different islands.

This is where the two pals were parted. They never saw one another again. Smithy was to go to Thasos and Middleton to Tenedos. So they said good-bye to each other and wished each other the best of luck.

CHAPTER VIII

WILD DOGS

SMITHY, together with half a dozen more fellows, boarded a trawler the following day bound for Thasos, a small Greek island which the English had collared for use as an air station.

'Anyway,' said Smithy, 'we cannot get to a worse God-forsaken hole than the one we've just left. I don't know how they find these places. I'm sure they aren't on any decent map.'

All of them were on the forecastle sitting down having their dinner, which consisted of bully beef and biscuits washed down with ship's cocoa, which is very much like sand, when along the deck came an officer. As usual they all dropped their grub and stood up to attention. The officer told them to sit down and get on with their eating.

'Have you got any bully beef to spare?' he asked. 'I'm damned hungry.'

'Yes, sir,' answered Smithy, 'there's plenty. Would you like a drink of cocoa as well?'

'By gad, I should, if you can spare it.'

The poor devil gulped it down him as though he hadn't had a meal for a week, and when he'd finished he thanked them and asked if any of them wanted a drink of whisky.

They all looked at one another, waiting for each other to speak. At last one of the fellows, who looked as though he liked whisky, answered, 'Yes, sir'.

'Right, I've got a bottle in my bag. I'll go and fetch it.'

When he had gone, Smithy said: 'I wonder who the hell

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he is. Fancy an officer talking to common men like us, he ought to be ashamed mixing with his inferiors.'

'Look out, he's coming.'

'Anybody got a corkscrew? Never mind, I'll shoot the neck off.' He said no more but pulled his revolver and shot the neck off as clean as a whistle.

'Not the first time you've done that, sir,' said one.

'You can bet it isn't,' he answered, as he handed it round.

All of them took a sip, it being too strong to take a good swig, and then handed it back.

The officer, who, by the way, happened to be a real lord serving with the rank of Lieutenant R.N.V.R., held the bottle up.

'Well, well! And you call yourselves Englishmen and can't drink real whisky better than that. Watch me, I'll show you how to put this stuff away.' Then up went the bottle, which was more than three parts full, and without removing it from his mouth he drank the lot.

'God's truth!' murmured Smithy, 'can't he drink!'

'And that's that,' he said, as the empty went overboard.

'Come on, let's have a game at cards,' he said, 'we shan't get there until late afternoon.'

'What sort of a place is it we're going to, sir?' asked Smithy.

'Oh, it's a fine little place, sort of home from home; you'll think you're on your holidays. I'll bet when the C.O. knows that I'm on board he'll say we don't want that drunken sot here. I don't think he'll like me somehow. Still, I'm here and he'll have to put up with me. One thing, I can't get drunk for another week, because I'm broke. The old woman didn't send me my allowance for last month, and if she doesn't send it by next mail she'll hear about it.'

He kept the men entertained for two or three hours. It seemed to them so out of place for a naval officer to talk as he was doing to them; they hadn't been used to it, in fact, every time they had met an officer in England it meant strict attention and a smart salute.

Yet this officer, whom we will call Lord Tee, was one of the bravest men Smithy ever met, as you will read later.

Towards evening the trawler drew towards Thasos, which looked like a fairy island, almost too beautiful to describe.

'That's the place we're going to,' said Tee. 'You wouldn't think there was a war on would you?' Everything seemed so peaceful and silent from the distance; all one could see was trees, and mountains in the background here and there; half way up the mountains perched houses with their white walls and red roofs. Nothing could be seen of the air station, that being farther inland. But on getting nearer, the seaplane sheds could be seen poking through the olive trees.

As the boat dropped anchor a small motor boat put out towards them, causing a wash, which was the only movement around. Soon it was alongside and the men with their baggage climbed over the side of the trawler and dropped into it.

The only suitable landing place was a small wooden structure which served as a pier, and here they stepped on land, each man collecting his kit, intending to carry it to the camp.

'Don't bother about that,' said the motor boat coxswain. 'We've got Greeks to do the hard work here, they'll fetch it later on.'

'Blimey,' said Smithy, 'is it a dream or are we still at war?'

'You'll see plenty of war here,' said the cox. 'It ain't so

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peaceful as it seems to be. Sometimes it's like a earthquake on this island, about twenty Huns trying to turn the place inside out.'

They were led through groves of olive trees until they finally reached the camp, which was placed amongst the trees, and a little farther on was the aerodrome, a small clearing at the foot of the mountain, which looked more like a well-kept lawn than a landing ground.

All the members of the camp came out to greet them, some knew one another and those that didn't soon got chummy.

Then the mail, which had come on the boat, was dished out, and everybody dispersed to their own quarters to read their letters and open parcels. The cooks, who were Greeks, were ordered to get the newcomers something to eat, and before many minutes had passed they were all feeding, and not on bully beef, but on boiled bacon and real English white bread.

After the feed they were shown to a marquee where, in the meantime, their kit had been brought.

'You can sleep up the trees, if you like,' said the P.O., 'until you've time to make a bed frame. But you must have a mosquito net over you or you'll get fever before you've been here five minutes.'

Most of the old hands had made up beds out of packing cases and stretched their hammocks over the frame, thus making themselves fairly comfortable. But when Smithy made his it was a super bed, complete with spring mattress. After making the frame he commandeered a few yards of Sandow's elastic, which was used as springs on the aeroplane chassis, and stretched it over in a network sort of fashion. The idea soon spread, and every machine that crashed the first thing that was taken off was the Sandow's. If the man

who got there first had a length, he sold it to one that hadn't. The morning after their arrival they were paraded; names and trades were taken and they were then told to report to different P.O.s. Smithy was told to report at the seaplane base, and wandered through the groves until he came to that quarter, where a seaplane was just about to be launched.

About a dozen men and three officers made up the company, assisted by about a dozen Greeks, who chatted and danced about, each trying to get hold of the lightest end of the seaplane, which was placed on a trolley and pushed down a slope into the sea. When the seaplane had floated off, the trolley was pulled back.

Smithy looked round for the officer in charge, but was unable to tell which were officers and which were men, they were all wearing nothing but a pair of shorts and a khaki shirt very much open at the neck.

'Who is the officer in charge?' he asked.

'That chap over there with a beard,' one fellow answered, pointing to a man just about to put a bathing costume on.

'I've got to report to you,' said Smithy to this gentleman.

'Oh! right. There's not much to do at present. Just stand by until that machine returns, then you can clean the sparking plugs.'

'Well, well,' said Smithy to himself, 'this must be a sanatorium.'

When the machine came back the Greeks pushed the trolley down and pulled it back up the slips, while the air-men fussed round the engine. Smithy hadn't a dog's chance to clean those plugs, as by the time he'd found a spanner the job had been done. After the machine was pushed into the shed the dinner bell rang and everybody packed up and wended their way to the camp. There was no work after

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dinner, as it was considered too hot to work in the afternoon, so each man occupied his time in his own way. Some went bathing, some played cards, and some went to sleep in their hammocks, which were slung in the trees.

After tea, two machines were sent up for patrol for about half an hour, then work was finished for the day. What a life!

The island belonged to the Greeks, but there were as many Turks walking about as there were Greeks. They were a villainous looking crowd, most of them wore the national dress, which consisted of shirt, a large sash round the waist, generally stuffed with knives of all shapes and sizes, and a pair of trousers which looked more like a bag than trousers. The backside part of them hung down to the knees and swung about as the wearer walked. Then came a pair of white stockings, and sandals made out of goatskin.

Smithy tried hard to get to know the origin of these trousers and got several reasons, but the most likely ones were given by an old man who looked a hundred years old. He said that when the Greeks went to war with the Turks they were so afraid that they had to wear napkins, and that was the reason for the fullness round that particular part.

The next reason was given by a younger Greek. He said that the people of the East believed in the coming of a second Christ, and that this time he would be born of a man, so they wear those trousers because they never know who will be the lucky one. Smithy didn't know which tale to believe, but that's what he was told, so the reader can make his own choice.

There were about fifty Greek labourers; each was paid about five francs a day, which was about equal to four shillings. They were an idle lot on the whole and dodged work

if they could. Some of them were tradesmen, such as carpenters and builders: these received a little more pay than the rest. It was wonderful what they could do with their crude tools. Equipped with nothing but a hatchet and frame saw, they could do as good a job as some of our own carpenters with their modern tools. The labouring men did all the rough work under the eye of a super Greek, who was equal to any slave driver. Many a time whilst going home to the village at night he was ambushed and given a rough house by the men, despite the row of revolvers and knives in his belt.

It was rumoured that each man had to give him part of his wages every week or he got the sack; also when a man stole things, such as tinned food or clothing, he had to give the foreman half or he was reported, and that meant severe punishment.

Several were caught and punished in the following manner. The thief was fetched from his house by armed marines and kept in a guard tent all night; the following morning all the Greeks were paraded and the thief brought forward between armed guards.

The crime was then read out by the C.O. and then the sentence, which was interpreted. Something like this:

'Constantions, you are charged with stealing six tins of bully beef belonging to the British Government. You cannot plead not guilty because the stuff was found in your house, therefore you will receive twenty strokes with the cat, to be administered forthwith.'

The poor devil was then flung over a box and tied down by the marines so that he couldn't move. Then the sergeant, a great hefty fellow armed with a long cane, which was really an aeroplane skid used for fastening under the wing tips to

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keep them from tipping on to the ground, came forward, with nothing on but a pair of shorts.

The doctor was on the spot to see that he could stand the punishment, then with a running swipe down came the cane with a whack, as hard as the sergeant could possibly hit. Then came a yell, then another whack; it was terrible to hear the poor devil shouting. Smithy asked one of the Greeks what he was shouting, and was told that he was shouting for his mother, which seemed amusing, as this particular man was about fifty and had a beard about twelve inches long.

When the last stroke had been given, and the sergeant was wiping the sweat from his brow, the man was untied, lifted off the box, and told to get off and never to come near the aerodrome again. Then the Greeks were given a short lecture and told to carry on with their work. One of the Greeks told Smithy that he would sooner be shot than stand that punishment, and it was quite true that they couldn't stand pain, especially a hit on the jaw with a fist. Altogether there were about twelve punished for theft, but they could never catch the foreman, who, everybody knew, was the worst.

The first disturbance of the peaceful surroundings happened a few days after their arrival.

Everybody had been in bed for about an hour, when the alarm bell rang and the guns on the top of the mountain began to fire. In a second everybody was dashing about, running into one another in their efforts to get out of the tents to the dugouts.

Smithy hadn't time to find his trousers, and daren't strike a match, so ran with the others without. He had just reached the dugout when the earthquake began.

'Now you're sure going to know that there's a war on,'

said one of the chaps. 'It's going to be different to what you've seen in England, just one Zep over hundreds of square miles. They come in dozens here, and carry about a dozen bombs each, and all to drop on about two square miles. By the time they've done the aerodrome is like a . . . ' Boom, boom!

'That's a near'un, only a few yards away.' Boom, went another, which removed part of the roof of the dugout and sent a draft of air through, enough to blow them all out.

One of the new fellows began to get the wind up and said that dugout wasn't safe, he pushed by to run out to another one a little farther on.

'Stop where you are, you silly young beggar, you're as safe here as anywhere. If you're fated to get blown up you will and it don't matter if you run to hell.'

But he wouldn't take heed, and ran. And it was his last run. As he got about half-way towards the other dugout a bomb dropped right in front of him blowing him to pieces. In fact, they only found one of his boots with half a leg inside.

There were about ten raiders and each carried about ten bombs; on examination the following morning the aerodrome was transformed into little mountains, but luckily the machines were not touched, thanks to the olive trees which concealed the sheds from view.

'We shan't get much sleep for a few nights now this moon is here,' said Smithy's tent mate.

'Why?' asked Smithy.

'Because they come here one night and we go to their aerodrome the following night, sort of playing the damn fool. You'd better go and get all the sleep you want in the afternoon.'

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'Sounds cheerful. It ain't such a peaceful place as it looks,' was the answer. All the following day the men were kept busy getting the machines ready for the return raid. The machines were loaded with bombs and equipped with machine-guns in readiness for the moon to come up. At about midnight all hands were called out, and the machines were wheeled out of the sheds on to the aerodrome ready for getting off. Then out came the pilots and observers in their flying kit.

Lord Tee bent down and looked under his machine at the bombs.

'Is this all the dope I've got?' he asked one of the armourers.

'Yes, sir, the racks only hold half a dozen.'

'What's the use of only half a dozen, they wouldn't blow a tent up; it's an air station that we're after, my lad. Just you go and fetch a few more.'

'There's nowhere to carry them, sir.'

'What do you mean? Nowhere to carry them! I can carry them on my lap. Nip and fetch another half dozen small ones.'

The armourer was soon back with the extra bombs, and after he had climbed into the machine they were placed in his lap; all that could be seen of him was his head peeping out. They went off with the usual good luck call from the men, who returned to the camp to await the return, which was usually three hours. This business was carried on regularly, weather permitting, and providing the moon was bright. The men got little sleep, if any.

How Smithy envied the fellows with staff jobs. They didn't have to turn out when the machines went up. But he vowed to himself that he would get one by hook or by crook, and get one he did, and a damn good one at that, which you will hear of later.

The one sport for the camp was wild dog hunting. The island was overrun with them. Each night they would surround the camp and pinch any grub they could find. They were not content with pinching the grub, but made such a hell of a row waking everybody up with their sniffing and grunting. During the day not one could be seen, and they were big enough, some of them were as large as a small donkey and as fierce as a wolf when cornered.

Sometimes the officers would go on a shooting expedition around the villages and sometimes get into serious trouble for shooting somebody's pet. It didn't matter to them whose it was so long as it was a dog. One night, or rather early morning, the whole camp was awakened by two gun shot reports. Naturally, everybody thought enemy aircraft was about, as two shots constituted the official warning.

Nobody could hear the engine of a machine and all began to return to their beds. Then a couple more shots rang out, the noise coming from the olive grove near by.

On investigation, there stood Lord Tee, dressed only in a pair of pants and a pair of top boots, with a couple of revolvers, one still smoking, and near him lay two large dogs.

'What's the meaning of this, Tee?' asked the C.O. 'You know damn well you are not to fire a shot anywhere round the camp.'

'I couldn't help myself, sir,' he answered. 'I had a box of chocolate on my table at the side of my bed, and I was awakened by sniffing, and when I struck a light there were two damn dogs in my tent and they'd yaffled the lot.'

'Well, you shouldn't have fired a shot. You knew it was the alarm and that everybody would turn out. Don't let it happen again. Good night. Oh, and by the way, if you want to know how to kill dogs silently consult Petty Officer

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Brown. He will demonstrate how it is done without waking the whole camp up.'

Petty Officer Brown stood only five feet, but what he lacked in height he made up in artfulness. He boasted that during the six months he had been on that station he had killed at least two hundred dogs.

He had nearly been mauled two or three times himself, which some readers will think served him jolly well right when informed of his method of killing the dogs.

The following night Tee arranged with P.O. Brown to see a demonstration, and Smithy asked if he could accompany them. Getting permission they met at the galley, where there was more chance of a good catch. Armed with an empty oil drum, a coil of rope and, of course, the bait, which was a tin of bully beef, they made their way to a tree not far from the grub store.

'Now keep quiet while I set the trap.'

The oil drum had the end cut out and was laid on its side just under the tree; inside the drum, right at the end, was placed the bully. Then the rope was slung over a branch and a noose made round the mouth of the drum.

'Now, have you got that hammer ready, Smithy?' he asked.

'Right. Now we'll stand inside this tent with the rope, and keep quiet.'

They hadn't been there long when they heard sniffing, and Mr. Doggy came along. And what a dog! He stood nearly as high as P.O. Brown.

A few sniffs found the drum, then in went his head, the P.O. pulled up the rope and there the dog hung in the air making the most awful noise in its throat.

The P.O. hung on to the rope while Tee made it fast. Then the execution began.

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Lifting the hammer above his head, the P.O. brought it down with a bang on the dog's skull. 'Take that, he said. 'And that.' Bang went the hammer. Smithy began to wonder when he would finish.

'You can't be too sure,' he said. 'I once let one down thinking he was dead and the brute came alive again and damn near worried me. He would have done, only the chap what was with me shot him.'

After a few more bangs the dog was let down and the trap set for another. They caught four in an hour, but Smithy went after the second one had been caught. He was feeling sick.

One thing about Brown was that he always went for big game; if a small dog came he frightened it off and waited for a large one.

They were buried the same night, as Mr. Brown didn't know whether he had killed a pet dog or not, so that when the Greeks came in the morning no animals were to be seen. Not that Mr. Brown was frightened of the Greeks, but the Greeks would complain to the C.O. and that would have meant that the sport, as it was called, would be stopped. As Brown said, 'I'm a butcher by trade and I must keep my hand in for when I get back'.

CHAPTER IX

MOUNTAINEERS

THE camp was supposed to rise at seven and parade at seven-thirty, but very few turned out except those who had to.

The parade was worse than Harry Tate's. One would wonder what the C.O. at the Crystal Palace would have said if he had seen it. Some of the men had one boot and one slipper on. Some with their braces hanging down and holding their trousers up with one hand. Another would appear with his face half shaved, having the lather on one side. They would sometimes wait ten minutes until the duty officer arrived. He would come rubbing his eyes and yawning, with his pants and a pair of gumboots on. He would then look round and say, 'Carry on', and return to his bed to finish his sleep. Most of the men would do the same.

But one morning the C.O. arrived on the scene, and then the fireworks began to go up. All the tents were searched and everybody turned out. Then all their names were taken and they were told to report at ten-thirty at the C.O's. tent. Needless to say, Smithy was among them.

There were about two dozen reported at the C.O's. tent that morning, including two officers.

After they had been given a lecture, which lasted about a quarter of an hour, they were told that the punishment would be to climb Gun hill, as it was called, in one hour, and were to start at six o'clock in the evening. If it was not climbed in the hour they would have to go up each evening until they did.

Now, Gun hill was a huge mountain situated at the rear of the aerodrome. On the top were mounted two anti-aircraft guns. About a dozen men lived up there, taking watches day and night. How the hell they got the guns up there Smithy didn't know, as it took all a man's time to climb empty handed, let alone dragging parts of guns up.

There was also a telephone at the top, with which they could communicate with the camp at the bottom. So there was no question of getting out of the climb as they rang through the minute the defaulter or defaulters arrived.

That particular night was extra hot; the defaulters assembled on the parade ground, dressed in appropriate clothing, which was more or less no clothing at all. All the camp turned out to cheer them as they marched away headed by the two officers who also had to go. Talk about anybody climbing for pleasure, they must be daft. Smithy twisted his ankle two or three times, and the blasted brambles scratched his legs, fetching blood for the blinking flies to drink. Sweat poured down their faces and they were so thirsty they licked it in to moisten their tongues.

They managed to reach the top in well under the hour, and drank the small lake nearly dry that was on the top. But, as Smithy said, it was worth the climb to see the view from the top. If it was put on canvas, people would ridicule it and say there wasn't such a place, only in fairy tale books. They all sat there watching the sun go down.

Beyond the aerodrome was a vast stretch of water which was all colours of the rainbow. Dotted here and there were islands covered with green shubbery and trees. The sunset in the distant background lit the sky to a vivid crimson, which was reflected on the sea. A more beautiful picture could not be possible.

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They sat there until it was getting dusk, then began their descent, which was not quite so bad as going up, but more dangerous, as it was too dark to notice the stones which they repeatedly slipped on.

Nearly at the bottom lay the village where the pub, or café, as it was generally called, was situated. The proprietor never had such a day. Bottles of beer went down as fast as he could serve them, and by the time they had finished drinking it was nearly ten o'clock, which meant a quick return to camp. It was a tired and worn-out party of mountaineers who rolled into their beds that night, and it was lucky for them that there was no air raid.

During Smithy's stay at that station he had occasion to climb that mountain several times. Sometimes with company and sometimes alone, for doing those things he ought not to have done, but were worth risking if they came off five times out of six. One week Smithy had to climb that hill four times alone, and finally decided that it was about time something was done about it.

He had two more climbs to make. He made a noise like a bribe to the telephone operator at the top of the hill to report that he arrived when he hadn't, but it didn't come off. Then he tried the operator at the camp to say he had received the message that Smith had arrived. But the bribe money was too high for him, so he sat down on his bed to think.

'Now, Smithy,' he said to himself, 'pull yourself together and think. You've got out of worse messes than this; surely you can diddle the blighters this time.'

'The way out came quite naturally just because it had to,' said Smithy, after his scheme had worked.

It happened that that same night he'd been playing cards and had had an abnormal run of luck. In fact he broke the bank

and by the time the card party broke up almost all of them were owing him some money. Now his biggest debtor happened to be the storekeeper, who didn't like to lose money and who would do anything for it. Smithy went to pay him a visit the same night in his hut, which was also the stores.

'Hello Smithy,' was the greeting. 'Have you come to let me off my debt?'

'Yes,' said Smithy, 'if you agree to my proposition.'

'Well, what is it?'

'You've got an instrument for tapping telephone wires, a sort of portable thing you can carry about, ain't you?'

'Yes, two or three. Why, what do you want one of them for? Have you turned spy or something?'

'No, but I want to borrow one to-morrow night in exchange for your debt.'

'What do you want it for?'

'Well, it's like this. I've got to climb that fool mountain again to-morrow, and I don't want to, so I thought if I had one of your gadgets I could tap the wires and report that Smith had arrived at the top. All I need do is to undo the joint at the bottom, connect up and then join up again after I'd done the business.'

'Blimey, Smithy, I don't know how you've got the nerve! If the C.O. found out you'd sure get hung. Besides, he'd want to know how you got hold of the telephone and then I'd cop out.'

'You needn't bother your head about that; I could easy say I'd pinched it out of your hut whilst you weren't looking.'

'I don't think I dare risk it, Smithy; I don't like climbing mountains.'

'Now listen to me, old chap. Just you go to the latrine and

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leave me here. If you don't want to go there, try. Then by the time you come back I shan't be here, and don't bother to take stock of your telephones when you return either.'

After a while he reached for his hat and went out. And Smithy went in, found what he required, and hopped it.

'Damned marvellous what money can do!' thought Smithy, as he was hiding the instrument under a boulder at the foot of the mountain; 'and that reminds me, I must mark them aces on that new pack of cards before I play with them to-night.'

After tea, off he went to the petty officer's tent to report that he was just going up.

'Right you are,' answered that gentleman, pulling out his watch.

'It's half-past six now, and you're to report on the phone before half-past seven; and if you don't, up you go again, my lad. See.'

He got the usual cheers from the men as he left the camp, and also a little advice, such as: 'Don't get up too quick or the bloke will make the next poor devil do it in less than the hour.'

To this Smithy answered with a raspberry, and made tracks towards the hill.

When he arrived where he'd hidden the telephone, he sat down and pulled a book from under his shirt.

'I'll have a read for three quarters of an hour, then start to perform and trust to luck for the rest.'

The time soon passed, then Smithy got ready.

Finding a joint, it was the work of a few minutes to disconnect and couple up the instrument. He wound the handle two or three turns and listened for the operator at the camp.

'Hello,' came a voice, 'camp speaking.'

'Gun hill speaking,' said Smithy, disguising his voice as best he could.

'Air-mechanic Smith just arrived, time 6.45.'

'Righto. Anything else to report!'

'No, everything quiet.'

'Right, good-bye.'

'That's that,' said Smithy, as he proceeded to put things as they were.

Five minutes later he walked into the village, trusting to luck that he wouldn't meet any one from the camp who would wonder how he got back so quickly.

He was well known in the village and got on well with the Greeks, who loved to hear him do a bit of swearing in Greek, and it was his boast that he was the only man from the camp who had access to the dwellings of the Greeks, who were very reserved. Often he was invited to a cup of coffee, which was more like treacle and nearly poisoned him, but not to drink it was an insult which wouldn't have done him any good, as it was in these houses that Smithy made several good deals, buying and selling or, better still, selling and very little buying.

In fact he was the recognized second-hand dealer in the camp. He bought all the old boots and clothes. When one of the men had nearly worn his breeches' backside out, he bartered them to Smithy for so many tots of rum. Smithy never drank his daily ration of rum, but was too wide to tell the P.O. that he didn't drink intoxicating liquors. It wasn't because he was against it in any way, but he just didn't like it and always said he'd sooner drink a glass of rat poison than a glass of beer. So instead of refusing it he saved it in a large jar, and that was as good as money to him.

He would wait until he had a good collection of stuffs,

ranging from a pair of boots to an under-shirt. These were hung round his tent. Often the C.O., on coming round, would ask where THAT MAN got all these clothes and rags and why didn't he burn them. Then they would have to be taken away and sold.

Packing them up in a bundle, he'd make his way to the village, and it was marvellous how the news got round among the Greeks that Smithy had been seen going towards a certain café with a parcel. By the time he got there the place was nearly full, all eagerly waiting to see what was going.

The boss of the café always welcomed Smithy on these trips, and rubbed his hands, for it meant more business. But often he wasn't so pleased at the end of the auction, as there was often a fight between the bidders if one kept out-bidding the other. The cafés there are nothing like they are in England, in fact, far from it. The first impression one gets on entering is a large pig sty. Bare cobble stones form the floor. Around the walls are a few crude shelves on which are stone jars; the contents are different concoctions called wine. All down the sides is dried wine with flies buzzing around. The jars were never washed. The sight of this generally quenches one's thirst, if it isn't too bad. But sometimes one feels like drinking the flies as well.

On some of the jars a fowl might be perched, chuckling away and doing its business down the jar, where it remained to add to the picture.

There are no windows in the walls, but a slit covered half-way with a piece of old sacking serves the same purpose. At night a few candles or empty salmon tins filled with olive oil serve for illumination.

To cap all, the places stink of pigs, wine, olive oil, and garlic.

The most popular drink was called vino. This was a red mixture that wasn't too bad and cost the men from the camp one penny a glass and the Greeks a half-penny. There was many a row over that, but all the cafés did the same, so it was a case of take it or leave it. Another drink was mastic, which was a clear liquid tasting like aniseed, and went straight to the head. Strange to say, if a man got drunk on mastic he could keep drunk all the week by drinking a glass of water each time he felt sober. Not many got drunk on that, as it appeared to give them terrible pains in the head, which were not easily got rid of. It was in such a place as this that Smithy entered, amid a gabble of Greek which he didn't understand. And perhaps it was a good job he didn't.

When the bundle was on the floor, the crowd gathered round. First came a pair of trousers, which had had the legs cut short, owing to the bottoms getting worn, but were in every other way perfect.

'Now, how much?' shouted Smithy. One franc was bid, then up it went until it was knocked down to a LADY. Several remarks were thrown to her, which caused much laughter, but Smithy couldn't understand what they were. He had a good idea, though, and joined in the fun.

'Now, how much for a pair of boots?' These were passed round; everybody wanted to measure them against his feet to see if they would fit. They had no idea of size. They were knocked down in exchange for a small revolver, which Smithy already had a client for in the camp. Altogether there were about five pairs of trousers, four pairs of boots and half a dozen pairs of socks, one pair of which stood up by themselves and gave the place a change of smell from garlic. But that didn't bother the crowd or keep

them from handling them. And strange to say they fetched the biggest price. Smithy put that down to them being stiff, and the crowd thinking they were made of good stuff.

The sale came to an end and Smithy informed them that the next would be in a month's time. Or rather his interpreter informed them. This was a Greek who could speak perfect English, having been in Canada for a few years.

Treating the whole house to a drink, which came from the proceeds, and paying the interpreter, Smithy left them arguing and examining their purchases.

On one of these occasions there was trouble in the camp.

Smithy had returned after a very profitable sale, and was about to turn in for the night, when all of a sudden, there was a bang and scuffle at the tent door.

'What the hell's up?' shouted Smithy, as one of the chaps came blundering in.

'Where's my trousers, Smithy?'

'What trousers? I don't know anything about your trousers.'

'Oh you don't, don't you? Well, see here, somebody saw Johnson bring a pair of trousers to your tent to sell for him. And they don't happen to be his, they're mine, and I want 'em back right now or I'm going to tell the C.O.'

'I can't fetch 'em back. I've sold 'em to a Greek. I'll pay you for 'em instead of paying Johnson, if you like.'

'No, I want my trousers. I ain't got no more to wear. I've only got a pair of shorts and I'm too blasted cold in 'em.'

'Look here, I'll give you mine. I don't wear 'em and they are all right.'

'Let's have a look at 'em. Mine were nearly new.'

Smithy found them and handed them over.

The chap examined them all over and grunted: 'They aren't so good as mine were.'

'Why, what's the matter with 'em? They're cleaner than yours were anyway.'

'Aye, they are clean enough, but they are a bit threadbare about the back.'

'Well, all you've got to do is show 'em to the storekeeper and he'll give you another pair in exchange for them.'

'All right, let's have 'em, and don't forget, anything that's got my name on is mine, and if it happens again look out for trouble.'

'Aye, aye. Hop off.'

'Still a bit of profit showing anyway,' Smithy said to himself as he tumbled into bed. 'But I don't know what I'm going to do if it turns cold all of a sudden. I've only got one pair of shorts to my name.' This happened to be only too true, for when he washed his shirt and shorts it had to be done in a tin filled with petrol, so that he could hang them in the sun to dry, then put them on straight away. No wonder he boasted that no insect would bite him. Even when he went into the sea he came out dry, the water running off his skin like off a duck's back.

CHAPTER X

SEAPLANES

At the seaplane base there was a small boat with a small engine attached, which had to be lifted over the end when the boat was pushed out into deep water.

It was mostly used by the officers, who often went a trip round the island, and to get hold of it was as bad as walking into a bank and pinching the till.

One evening Smithy decided that he'd like to try his hand at fishing, using the Greek method of going out at night with a little lantern hanging over the back of the boat, and a flask of olive oil. The idea, according to Smithy, was that the light attracted the fish, and then a few drops of oil were dropped on the water. Then the fish made a flying leap after the drops of oil and landed over the side of the boat. All you'd got to do was to knock 'em over the head to kill 'em.

It happened that the officers had a bit of a do on, that particular night, a party or something, and Smithy thought that it would be a good chance to pinch the boat. After raking up a Greek and one of his mates, they proceeded, armed with the necessary equipment, to the seaplane base. The boat was there all right, with the engine lying in the bottom, complete with a tin of petrol.

They pushed it out, then clambered inside. Then things began to go wrong.

The sea happened to be a little choppy and the boat was rocking from side to side like a cork. 'Now,' said Smithy, who was captain of the expedition, 'give me a lift with this

engine.' There wasn't room for two to lift it over the end, so one man had to grab hold of it in his arms, then stand on the seat and drop it over the end, so that two hooks hung on the back, leaving the propeller in the water.

By the time they helped him to get it to the end of the boat they had drifted about a quarter of a mile out to sea.

'I've got it,' shouted Smithy. 'Now try and hold the boat steady whilst I drop it over. Now, are you ready?' The boat gave a lurch just as he was standing on the seat. Then over he went with the engine in his arms, to the bottom, which was about twenty feet deep.

He came up spluttering and coughing without his engine.

'That's done it,' he spluttered, opening his eyes to see two grinning faces looking at him.

'Don't sit there, you fools, do something. Take notice where we are; then we'll perhaps find it.'

They still smiled, which made Smithy see red, and without a word he pulled on the side and turned the boat right over, flinging the two grinning apes into the sea.

'There now, you've got something to grin about,' said Smithy, 'and I hope you can't swim.' But they both could, so after righting the boat they clambered in.

Whilst all this was happening the boat had drifted farther out to sea, and to their horror they found that there were no oars to row back with. They tried to swim and tow the boat, but the tide was too strong and beat them. Then they all yelled together to try and attract attention from the camp, but it was hopeless.

'Looks as though we have got to stop here all night, and God knows where we'll drift to by morning. Look well if a Jerry submarine pops up and uses us as a target,' said Smithy.

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'What about swimming for it? Do you think we could make it?'

'No damn fear,' answered his mate. 'It is farther than it looks. We do stand a chance of the late patrol spotting us. He's due any time now.'

Just as the words were spoken the drawl of an aeroplane engine was heard.

'We've nothing to wave, have we?'

'You've got a shirt, ain't you! Take it off and wave it. That will dry it all the quicker.'

All three took their shirts off and stood up in the boat, waving to the machine, which was nearly overhead by then.

'We're spotted, thank God,' said Smithy, as the pilot dropped into a spin, then picked up again, flying back towards the camp.

'Well, that's that. But what sort of a tale am I going to tell the C.O. He'll want to know what we were doing in the boat, and what'll he say when he hears about the engine at the bottom of the sea.'

Several tales were thought out between them, but all of them seemed to have a missing link. Smithy almost thought of telling the truth for once. Until he thought of a better one.

Before very long they saw a motor boat making towards them.

'Saved,' shouted Smithy, as they threw the towing line for him to catch. 'Saved in the nick of time.'

'You'll blinking well wish you'd of got drowned by the time the C.O.'s sent you up the mountain a few times,' was all the sympathy he got from the motor boat coxswain.

Visions of mountaineering flashed through Smithy's mind until he thought of his friend the storekeeper.

'Who was in the machine that spotted us?' he asked.

'It was old Benson. When he came back we wondered what was the matter. You'd have looked well if it had been a Jerry and he'd turned his machine-gun on you.'

'Blimey, I'd never thought of that; for all we knew we might have been waving to a Jerry, it was too dark to notice whether it had bulls' eyes on its wings or not.'

As they were being towed back Smithy instructed his mate to leave the talking to him and only to agree to whatever he told the C.O. He told the Greek to clear out of sight as soon as they landed. After the boat had been beached, they made their way to report the matter to the P.O.

That gentleman took them straight to the C.O.'s tent without asking a question.

'I don't want to know anything about it,' he said. 'All I've got to do is to see that you get what's coming to you.'

'Wait here,' was the command, as they arrived outside the C.O.'s tent.

'The two men who were out in the boat are here, sir,' he shouted.

'I'll be out in a moment,' came the gruff answer.

'Blimey,' thought Smithy, 'he don't sound as though he's in a very good temper.' And in a low tone to his mate: 'Don't forget, leave me to do the talking, all you've got to do is to listen to what I say and back me up if he asks you anything.'

The tent door was pushed back and out stepped the C.O.

'Now what is all this I hear about you being out in the boat and having to be towed back?'

'Well, sir,' began Smithy, 'it was like this. I happened to go down to the seaplane camp to have a swim and just as I got there I heard somebody shouting for help. Then one of

the Greeks pointed out to sea, telling me that one of our chaps had put his arms up in the air and had sunk. I saw the boat there and, with the Greek's help, pushed it out, started the engine, and went out towards the man and just got there in time.'

'Who was the man?'

'Blake here, sir.'

'What were you doing to get out of your depth, if you cannot swim.'

'The tide took me out, sir.'

'Well, you don't seem any the worse for your adventure.'

'No, I'm all right now, sir.'

'Well, and what happened when you'd saved him?' he nodded to Smithy.

'Well, sir, when I dropped the engine on the back I was in too big a hurry to notice that it wasn't on properly. It took me there all right, but whilst I was lifting him in the engine fell into the sea and we hadn't got any oars or anything to get back with, so we drifted until the patrol plane happened to see us.'

'Oh, I see. And is the engine still in the sea?'

'Yes, sir.'

'About how far out?'

'I should say a quarter of a mile, sir.'

'Well, you've certainly told me a fine tale and I expect that I shall have to believe you. But the trouble is the engine. I cannot report that the engine has disappeared. There's only one thing for it, you must go out to-morrow and find it. And if you can't you'll have to pay for it out of your pay. That's all. Carry on.'

'Well, well,' said the petty officer, 'and to think he fell for a tale like that. Get off to your tent.'

Early next morning Smithy raked up two Greeks who were very good swimmers, and went out searching for the engine. They searched all morning, but couldn't find it.

'The blinking thing must have sunk in the mud or sand,' he said to the Greeks.

They had another go in the afternoon and were about to give it up, when one of the Greeks came up after a dive and said he'd found it. Smithy dived down and saw just the steering handle sticking up out of the sand. A rope was made fast and it was pulled inboard amid cheers from the camp.

To everybody's surprise, after an hour in the sun it started up like a bird. For weeks after Smithy had his leg pulled by the phrase: 'Hang a skipper who throws his engine overboard.' But he could stand it.

The following morning the monthly boat arrived, bringing mails and supplies, and this time about a dozen new men who had just come out from England. The usual greetings were exchanged. Some of them knew one another and chummed up at once, whilst the others just followed the crowd. Among the newcomers was a young fellow about twenty years of age, whom we will call Longdon. He was a gentleman, which could be easily noticed by his manner of speech. Not a word out of place, and so genial with everybody. He happened to sit next to Smithy in the mess tent at tea time. There happened to be butter on the menu as well as jam, which was a special treat only given on high days. It wasn't nice butter, straight off the farm sort, but it came in tins and was more like cheese, even tasted stronger. But it seemed to go down all right, especially if the jam was spread on thickly. They had exchanged a few words of ordinary conversation while waiting for the butter

to be passed down the table. There were only three tins to each table and each man took what he wanted and passed it on. Smithy himself didn't want any, but every time the tin came Longdon's way it was grabbed from under his eyes, himself being too good mannered to make a grab. After a while he managed to get up enough courage to shout up the table: 'Will you pass the butter, if you please.' Nobody took any notice, and he shouted again. Still no butter came, although the tins were standing on the table farther up. The poor fellow blushed, and Smithy thought he was about to cry.

'You don't want to ask for it that way. These chaps don't understand your sort of English. Just shout: "Pass that b—— butter down here. Are you deaf?"'

Longdon smiled, and seemed to be encouraged with Smithy at his side. He shouted in a meek tone: 'Pass that b—— butter down here.' Anyway, it had the effect, for tins of butter came from all round him, and by the time he'd done there were about half a dozen in front of him.

After that the two seemed to cotton on to one another and remained pals all the while they remained on that station. Smithy soon taught him the meaning of the motto of the Navy: MAN MIND THYSELF.

He was found a job as petty officers' mess cook, his duties being to superintend the cooking, which was done by a Greek; in fact there wasn't anything much to do, as another Greek did all the washing up, etc. Smithy was often invited to supper when there was something good on the menu and always had sugar in his tea when the others didn't; he also had rice pudding made of milk and not water. In fact, he proved a good pal, lending him money when he was broke; he even cadged the petty officers' old

clothes for him to sell. They always fetched a good price, with a posh badge on.

One night Smithy took him into the village to show him the sights. He got the breeze up when he saw the Greeks walking about with knives stuck in their sashes, and was nearly sick at the sight of the inside of one of the cafés.

They went into one of these cafés, and ordered two drinks. There were about a dozen Greeks hanging round and two were standing alongside the counter. Longdon had put his glass down to look round, and when he turned to pick it up it was empty.

'Someone has stolen my wine,' he said. Smithy looked at the Greek next to him and asked him what was the idea. All he got was a gabble of language which he couldn't understand but which made all the others laugh.

'Oh, so you think you're going to take a rise out of me, do you, you dirty Turk,' and he no sooner said it than his fist shot out to the chap's jaw. Bang! 'Hold that and get up and have another.'

The blow sent him flying over a form and he finished up among a few jars of wine, smashing them to pieces. Up he sprang pulling one of the formidable looking knives out of his belt. Things began to look ugly, when all at once a shot rang out and, turning round, they saw Lord Tee standing in the doorway with a revolver in his hand.

'Now, what's the matter here?' he asked, and by the time Smithy had explained, the place was empty. The Greeks had scattered.

'Well, we'd better get out of here at once or they might bring a crowd back. It's a good job I happened to be passing at the time or you might have been picked up with a knife

in your back. By the way, are there any nice girls in this village. I cannot find any?’

‘There are a few, but they have always got a Greek with them and they ain’t what you might call tasty either.’

‘Oh! Do you ever come across any sheep bells. I’m trying to get a set of about a dozen. Then I shall get them mounted on a stand and send them to my old woman for a Christmas box. She’ll like them, especially if she knows that I risked getting a knife in my back for pinching them off the sheep.’

The sheep were scattered all over the mountains, and most of them had bells made out of beaten copper or brass hung round their necks. Sometimes at night it was impossible to sleep for the row they made. There wasn’t much of a ring about them, it was more like somebody hitting a tin can with a stick.

‘I’ll try to get you some, sir,’ said Smithy, as they walked back to the camp.

Longdon made up his mind that he wasn’t going into that village any more, unless it was with a crowd. He was quite right too, as these brawls got so frequent that the C.O. forbade anyone to go into the village unless they were armed.

That night the air raid alarm went. In a few minutes everybody was out of their beds and rushing for the dug-outs. The drone of the engines got louder, then—Bang, bang, bang. Bombs were dropped all over the place. There were about twenty machines, each must have carried a dozen bombs. They circled round and round, dropping to a low altitude; any one with a rifle could have hit them with ease, in fact anyone throwing a stone could have hit them.

After a few circles they got a direct hit on the petrol and bomb dump, which was hid among the olive trees. The flames went up to a great height burning the trees around it. Then the bombs began to explode, and then started a miniature earthquake.

Lord Tee was in Smithy's dugout and would keep poking his head out to have a look round.

'What blasted cheek!' he said, 'flying as low as that. They'll land soon and ask us to fill them up with petrol and supply 'em with some more bombs.'

During a spell of quietness he went out and returned a few minutes later with a rifle.

'I'm going to have a pop at 'em when they come round again,' he said, as he made himself comfortable on the top of the dugout.

'He must be daft,' said Smithy, as he made a quick dive for inside.

Bang, bang. The bombs were dropping all round him, and he lay on his back popping away when one came his way.

After a while the raiders went off, and Tee shouted, 'All clear', adding that he shot one but didn't fetch him down.

'Liar,' murmured the troops.

The following morning the aerodrome looked like a ploughed field. All the hangars with the machines were burnt to the ground. They certainly scored that night. During the day several more machines were sent from the base, and a reprisal was arranged for the same evening. The reports said that we had to do as much damage as they did to us, even more, but everything was taken with a pinch of salt in these reports.

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When there were fires like that it was surprising what got burnt, or better to say, what was supposed to be burnt. Things such as aeroplane watches, leather clothing, revolvers, and any thing that was useful to have. In that fire the telephone that Smithy borrowed was burnt. At least, it was down on the list that a storekeeper had to make out. His idea was if Smithy borrowed it again and did happen to get copped he could take the C.O. and let him see for himself that all the phones were in the stores, except the one that Smithy kept in his kitbag. According to reports, quite a lot of money was made by one gentleman, who did all the necessary business of telephoning from the top of the mountain to report that so and so had reached the top — for a small sum.

One day Smithy was told off to dismantle one of the engines in a seaplane, along with a petty officer who was supposed to be in charge of the job. He originally belonged to the fleet, but came into the air service as an engineer. Engineer or not, he'd got the job and the pay. But according to Smithy he knew more about shovelling coal into the boilers than about an aeroplane engine.

The job had to be done in a hurry, and put together again by night, ready to go on a raid. They worked hard and managed to get it done in time.

The machine was loaded with bombs and launched, but returned again in about ten minutes. Smithy had gone to his tent and was just changing his shirt when in rushed the petty officer.

'What's up?' asked Smithy.

'We're in for it,' said that worthy. 'One of the oil pipes was disconnected and all the oil blew out. He only just got back in time, another few minutes and he would have seized

his engine up. My God, he ain't half in a stew. God knows what the C.O. will have to say.'

'Well, it's up to you. You was in charge of the job, not me,' said Smithy.

'I know, but you put the oil pipes on.'

'Oh, you liar. You did it yourself, I remember you asking where they were.'

'Oh, I can't remember whether I did or not. But that ain't it. We've got to find a way out somehow. You see, it's like this, Smithy, I'm a naval man, and it took me twelve years to get my rank, and if it were found out that I was at fault they would reduce me to the ranks and I've got a wife and four kids to keep. Won't you help me? It won't make any difference to you, 'cause you're only in for duration and they can't reduce you any more than you are now. Go on, Smithy, you say that you tightened them up and I'll make excuses for you and tell the C.O. that it was dark while we were doing it.'

'I think we can find an excuse for both of us,' answered Smithy. 'Give me time and I'll find a good 'un. We shan't go before the bloke until morning, shall we?'

'No, not if you clear off into the village until late.'

'Right, I'll come and see you later. Cheerio.'

Half an hour later Smithy made his way to the petty officer's tent.

'Where is that machine now, P.O.?' he asked.

'In the end, awaiting the Engineer Officer's inspection in the morning.'

'Well, come with me and I will tell you my idea.'

When they had walked down to the seaplane base Smithy said: 'Now, what about screwing that nut up on the oil pipe until it splits, then we can tell him it was screwed

up and must have been a faulty nut, it split when it got warm?"

"That's a damn good idea. Find a spanner and do it while I keep watch."

The following morning Petty Officer's and Air-mechanic Smith's names appeared on the board to report at the C.O.'s tent at ten sharp. Talk about a court martial, it couldn't have been worse.

"Off caps," came the command, and in they went. About half a dozen officers were sitting round a table, the C.O. at the head.

The broken pipe was on the table in front of him.

"Now," said the C.O., "before we go into this case I want you both to realize the seriousness of this business. One of you, which one remains to be seen, is guilty of gross neglect, which might have led to the loss of both pilot and machine."

"Now," he said, turning to the P.O., "did you fix this oil pipe or did Smith?"

"It was getting very dark, sir, and we both put different pipes on, but I am certain that all those I put on were properly screwed up."

Then turning to Smithy: "Did you put this pipe on?"

"I think I did, sir. But I screwed it up all right. It must have been faulty and burst."

He then asked the Engineer Officer if the person who was screwing the nut up would know when it split.

"Yes, most certainly he would."

Then to Smithy he said: "I'm going to suggest that while you were screwing that pipe up you felt it burst but thought, 'I will leave it, it will be all right.' Am I right?"

"Certainly not, sir. I have had enough experience that

to leave anything to chance on an aeroplane is fatal. I say that it must have been a faulty nut that wouldn't stand the strain put on it when it got hot.'

'Well, I don't know what to say? Anyway, you may go, I don't attach any blame to you.'

'Very good, sir. Thank you,' the P.O. replied. 'But I would like to say a few words in Smith's favour. Everything I've given him to do he's done well, and I have had no trouble with any engine after he's had it down.'

After a mumble between themselves the C.O. looked at Smithy and said: 'This is a very serious business. For the present we will leave it until we have talked the matter over, so you may go and you will hear the result later.'

'That's that,' said Smithy to himself, as he walked to his tent.

The boys came to ask how he had gone on, and chaffed him as to how many times he'd got to climb the mountain. Then in walked the petty officer.

He was very concerned as to the verdict and nearly kissed Smithy with gratitude. 'I don't know how to thank you, Smithy boy,' he said. 'If I can do anything for you I'll do it, no matter what it is.'

The following morning Smithy appeared before the C.O. again.

'Now, Smith, we have considered your case and have come to the conclusion that you are guilty of neglect. As the nut was burst when we found it instead of being left loose the crime is not so bad, but we think that you must have felt it burst whilst you were screwing it up. As I have said before, if it had been found loose it would have meant a court martial, which would have been very serious for you.'

'Your punishment will be this: You will be taken off the

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aeroplane work altogether and given a job on the camp where the work is not so important. That is all, you may go.'

Smithy couldn't believe his own ears. 'Blow me,' he said to himself. 'As though I want to work on the blasted machines! He must think it's a pleasure getting up at dawn and stopping up until midnight to start the damn things up. One thing, I cannot get a bad job, as the Greeks do all the dirty work, such as emptying latrines.'

At the next parade he was told to report to the Petty Officer as usual.

'Well, Smithy boy, I told you I'd look after you, and I've found you the softest job on the station. All you've got to do is to see that old Yann the Greek gets our meals ready and superintend the cook house. There's only a dozen of us N.C.O.s and we don't want much looking after. You'll have a tent to yourself, and keep our grub in it so that it don't get pinched, and you'll eat the same as us. Of course we get better grub than the other men and more of it. How does that sound to you?'

'Sounds all right. But what's the snag. I'm not struck on pot washing, had enough of that at the Crystal Palace to last me a life time.'

'I tell you, there ain't no snag. You have four Greeks to do the work, and all you've got to do is to watch 'em and see that they do it.'

'When do I take up residence?'

'Straight away. The Greeks are putting up your tent now, and when they've done take 'em to fetch your things for you.'

'Sounds too good to be true, but what about parades and getting up to send machines off?'

'You ain't got to attend any parades at all, only pay day parade and you don't mind that surely!'

Talk about home from home! That job was it. If Smithy had been left a fortune in civil life he couldn't have lived more idle. The Greeks all trying to outdo one another to gain favour carried him about, falling over each other to do it. His clothes were washed and by the time they went home at night everything was so tidy Smithy almost felt uncomfortable.

The next morning he was awakened by somebody unfastening the tent. Glancing at his watch he sprang out of bed. 'Oh hell, this is a good start. Half-past eight and the P.O.s had their breakfasts at eight. Now there'll be a row.'

In came Yann the Greek.

'What about the P.O.'s breakfasts? Why the hell didn't you wake me up?' yelled Smithy at him.

Yann went outside the tent and came back smiling with a cup of tea in his hand.

'P.O.s all had breakfast. Me always give it to 'em. Then me bring your cup of tea when they've cleared off to work. When you've drunk tea, there's a bucket of water for your wash. After wash breakfast.'

'Blimey,' said Smithy, 'am I dreaming? Did the other man they had go on this way?'

'Yes, me told him what to do.'

The fellow who had the job before had gone back to the base with fever, so that was how the job became vacant.

'Hope the beggar dies,' said Smithy to Yann, 'then he won't want his job back.'

He had his wash, then went into the cookhouse for his breakfast. There on the table was the best breakfast he'd seen for ages. Porridge first; fish rissoles next, then eggs

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and bacon cooked as good as a London chef could cook it. That lot was soon put away; then he wandered into the galley.

'Well, Yann, what am I supposed to do?'

'You're our foreman and don't do anything, only go to stores to draw the rations, then I and the other Greeks do work.'

'Yes, but don't I have to do anything but draw rations, that only takes ten minutes.'

'I tell you, you foreman, and foremans don't work. When I don't know what to give P.O.s for dinner I come and ask you. If you say bully beef boiled, I boil. And if you say bully beef fried, I fry. Savvy?'

'Yes, I savvy.'

'Good Smit, I think I like you. You think you like me?'

'I'm sure I do Yann.' That pleased him more than if he'd been given half a crown.

Smit, as the Greeks called him, soon got into the routine, which was:

Cup of tea in bed at eight-thirty.

A morning bathe in the sea.

Breakfast.

Fetch the daily ration.

A read or walk round the camp.

Dinner.

Afternoon sleep.

Tea and then a game at cards or other recreation.

Could you beat that for punishment?

'Your punishment will be that you will be taken off the aeroplanes and given a job on the camp.' And Smithy had to endure that punishment for about six months. And just because an oil pipe wasn't screwed up. 'If I'd have known

this was the punishment I'd have busted all the oil pipes on the station,' he thought.

Yann the cook was a real man, not like the majority of the Greeks that worked on the camp. He wouldn't pinch a slice of bread unless he was told that he could have it. Smithy often filled his bag with stuff that was left over and sometimes stuff that wasn't, such as a tin of bully beef or a loaf of bread. And he was amply repaid by the Greek's devotion.

Nothing was too good for Smit in his estimation, and never was a more sincere friendship set up than between these two men.

The following episode speaks for itself:

When the warning was given that enemy aircraft was approaching, the Greeks would run as fast as they could to the dugouts and get well under cover half an hour before the enemy arrived, and others would run and never stop until they were miles away from the camp. They were a windy crowd, frightened to death at nothing; but Yann wasn't like them. He never left the camp, and waited until the last minute before taking cover.

It happened that one morning about twenty enemy machines came over. They had already dropped about half a dozen bombs on the aerodrome, which was a decent distance from the camp, and Smithy was in his tent sleeping through it all. All the others had run to the dugouts, including Yann.

Smithy's tent was fastened on the inside, but he was awakened all of a sudden by somebody pulling him out of bed. 'What the hell's up?' he yelled, as he disentangled himself from the mosquito netting.

It was Yann. 'Quick Smit, Germans come drop plenty

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bombs.' Then there was a hell of an explosion; one dropped one about a hundred yards away, which shook the earth. Old Yann saw that Smithy was out then, and made a bolt back to the dugout, Smithy following with his trousers in his hand.

They reached the dugout safely and poor old Yann couldn't see for tears in his eyes and sank to the ground with his head in his hands, sobbing.

The boys told Smithy afterwards that two of the machines had dropped several bombs and all of a sudden Yann pushed them on one side, saying, 'Smit sleep, him not in dugout. Let me go to him.' They hadn't time to warn him before he was half-way over towards the tent.

Needless to say, Yann and his family were well looked after as regards food and clothing after that. In fact Smithy would have pinched the C.O.'s boots for him if he thought Yann wanted some.

CHAPTER XI

A LESSON IN SALUTING

SOME people think shooting birds is great sport, but if they want great sport combined with excitement I advise them to try a little aeroplane shooting. According to Smithy, it is great fun despite the danger. His argument is that birds and rabbits cannot retaliate, but the blokes in the aeroplane can, either by dropping a bomb at the back of your neck or popping at you with a machine-gun. One morning Smithy volunteered to act as one of the anti-aircraft gun's crew, there being one short. His job was the sighter, which means when the officer shouts out the range he turns a few knobs same as one does on a wireless set, then shouts back 'Range all set', so that the officer can shout 'Fire'.

This sounds all right in theory, but when it comes to practice things seemed to go all wrong.

The warning was given this particular morning very early. Half the camp were in bed when gun's crew fall-in was shouted.

Off Smithy went along with three other fellows to the gun, which was uncovered as quickly as possible.

'Where's Haden?' sang out the P.O. Haden happened to be the officer in charge, who was going to do the instructing part of the business; but he was nowhere to be found. By the time the machines were visible he came dashing along in his pyjamas, with one gumboot on and the other foot bare. He was just in the middle of his morning ablutions. His face was covered with lather and he had the

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soap in one hand and his brush in the other. A monocle in his eye completed the picture. Then the fun began. Lieutenant Haden shouted the range and Smithy turned the knobs and shouted, 'Right'. 'Fire', shouted Haden, and then 'bang' went the gun. Haden walked up and down doing a bit of lathering and a bit of range finding. Several quick shots were fired and several remarks were passed at the shooting, such as 'Just under his tail', 'A little more to the left'. Bang! 'That's got the beggar.' — 'No it ain't.' Bang! 'Look out, he's coming over towards us.' Bang! again. They didn't know the difference between the gun fire and the bombs, they both shook the earth.

They were firing for about half an hour until Smithy got tired of sorting the numbers on the dials and turned them any way.

'Anyway, what's the use of finding his blasted numbers,' said Smithy. 'He don't know what the hell he's shouting, so all we can do is to keep firing just to keep them at a good height.'

There were about a dozen machines overhead, dropping their bombs as fast as they could, but the gun's crew were too excited to realize the danger. The aircraft were getting lower and lower until they could see the bombs leave the machines.

One machine made towards them and dropped a bomb which whistled as it came down. 'Look out,' shouted the officer. 'Drop round your gun.'

They all dropped at the foot of the gun and waited for the big bang. But it didn't come, only a thud a few yards away.

'That was a near one, it's a good job it didn't go off,' said Smithy.

Up they got again and fired a few more shots. Then another whistle. 'Drop!' was the order. And drop they did, but too soon, for the chaps who were loading the gun didn't fasten the breech properly and the door, or what ever it is called, slid open, letting the shell fall out on to the cobbles.

When the bomb dropped into the sea a little distance away they all got up and without a word picked up the shell and shoved it back into the breach. If any of them realized the escape they had had they didn't say so, but if the detonator had been pierced on a piece of flint, which surrounded the bottom of the gun, this tale wouldn't have been told.

Haden had pretty well lathered his face by this time, using spit instead of water. Bang went another bomb and the splinters knocked his shaving brush clean out of his hand.

'Hell,' he said, 'I wish a piece would knock my whiskers off, then I shouldn't have the job of shaving.'

The machines cleared off when they had dropped all their bombs, and all the camp was mustered to clear up the damage, which was very small that time, and Lieutenant Haden went to finish his shave in comfort.

Orders came from headquarters that all the men who had been on that station a year or more had to be moved owing to the fever. Smithy had been there more than a year, but hadn't had a touch of it. He always boasted that the mosquitoes wouldn't bite him and the fellows always said that they couldn't bite through the layer of dirt that was over him. Nevertheless, Smithy had to go, fever or no fever. Poor old Yann nearly broke his heart when he said good-bye, and Smithy boarded the trawler which was to take him to the base.

It took them a day and a night to do the trip, which by

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rights ought to have been done in a few hours. The skipper said he had never known it to be so rough, and to make matters worse they hadn't brought any grub with them. It was a hell of a night, and the half dozen men couldn't stand up or sit down. The crew of the trawler were a rough crowd, but a bigger hearted lot couldn't be found. They gave them half their rations and even gave up their hammocks and bunks for them. When they refused, the answer was, 'Oh, that's all right, chums, we're used to this and you ain't, go and get a doss before you get washed overboard'.

They arrived at the base next morning.

'Thank God for that,' said Smithy, as he stepped ashore. 'If ever I was glad to get out of a ship I am damn glad to get off that packet. Talk about a cork in water, it wasn't in it compared with that cruise, and they sing of a life on the ocean wave. The bloke who wrote that wants to have a trip like that; he'd alter his tune then.'

That same morning they were sorted out and Smithy was ordered to go aboard the *Ark Royal*, which was a seaplane carrier converted from an old oil tanker, and lay in the harbour.

It was said that she would never move as she was resting on a heap of salmon and bully beef tins that had been thrown over the side; she had been there so long.

Smithy was put on board a small motor boat, together with his luggage, and dumped at the bottom of the gangway. The motor boat shoved off leaving him to carry his bags to unknown surroundings.

Smithy sighed to himself and, picking up his kitbag, began to climb the gangway. On reaching the top the only man he saw was a marine sentry, who didn't take a bit of notice of him, so he stepped on to the quarterdeck and stood

looking round for an officer or somebody to report to. All of a sudden a voice like a foghorn shouted, 'Hi, you come here'.

Poor Smithy looked round trying to find the owner of that pleasant voice, but couldn't.

'Hi, you, can't you hear me? Or are you deaf? You with the kitbag, hi!'

At last he spotted a chief petty officer poking his head through one of the portholes.

Over Smithy went, shaking at the knees.

The P.O.'s face was something like his voice, terrifying.

'Who the devil do you think you are, eh?' he asked.

'Air-mechanic Smith, sir, just come from the base.'

'Just come from the base have you. Well, Air-mechanic Smith, what do you mean by not saluting when you came on deck?'

'I didn't see any officers to salute, sir.'

'Look here, my lad, I don't want none of your funny answers or you'll find yourself in clink before you're much older, savvy.'

'I'm not trying to be funny, sir. I tell you I didn't see anyone, only that marine doing sentry, and he didn't take any notice of me.'

'Do you mean to tell me that you didn't know that you'd got to salute when you came aboard a battleship as soon as you stepped on to the quarterdeck?'

'No, sir. I didn't know; besides, this isn't a battleship.'

'What! Ain't a battleship ain't it! Well, do you think it is, a fishing smack?'

'No, sir, it's a seaplane carrier.'

'Now you listen here, my lad. What the hell do you think we are doing here? On a blinking pleasure cruise or

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something? This 'ere ship is the King's ship and part of the Navy, and everybody, it don't matter a damn who it is, he has to salute as soon as he puts his hoofs on the quarter-deck. Even the King himself does that, and Mr. Air-mechanic Smith, R.N.A.S., thinks he don't have too, eh? And while we're having this little talk, do you know why and who the salute is for?

'No, chief, I would be glad to know.'

'Well, you salute Nelson, see, N E L S O N. I don't suppose you've ever heard of him, have you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Oh, so you do know something about the Navy, well thank God for that any way. Who was he?'

'A great admiral, sir, in the time of Queen Anne.'

'That's right, and now go back and salute him and don't forget again.'

The ceremony was performed under his keen eye.

'You mind you don't break your arm bringing it up with such a jerk. Now you can hop it.'

'Yes, sir.'

Smithy did hop it, and quickly too. He didn't even stop to ask him where he could find the chief engineer, but found him after making a few inquiries.

The life on the ship was much better than Smithy thought it would be after such a splendid reception. The fellows were like one big family and he got on well with the old seamen, especially when they knew that he didn't drink his ration of rum that was dished out in the evening.

Smithy always drew his ration but gave it to first one and then another, until he made a bargain with an old salt who offered to do all his washing and sock mending in exchange for the rum.

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The deal went off all right until the sailor swopped one of Smithy's undershirts for one of his own that was full of holes. He got the sack and another one soon filled his place, even offering half of his baccy ration into the bargain.

One night enemy aircraft was reported proceeding toward the base. Smithy used to sling his hammock on two girders just under the main deck. It was very cool and with one of the portholes near he thought it would be very nice to watch the bombing going off on land, himself being quite safe.

The first bomb dropped and Smithy sat up in his hammock and poked his head through the porthole. It was grand watching the fireworks going off in the distance. He was enjoying it immensely, when all of a sudden there was a hell of a bang and a draught of wind which pushed his head back and slammed the porthole window with a bang.

Over Smithy went right out of his hammock and just managed to catch hold of the railings which ran around the well deck or he would have dropped down into the bottom of the ship.

He found out later that an anti-aircraft gun was mounted on the deck just above where he was lying and that they had taken a pot shot at one of the machines.

While on that ship Smithy went down with the fever. The doctors called it *Flea botomus* fever, but Smithy called it something else, as he'd never felt so rotten in all his life.

The funniest part about this complaint was that you would be told off to carry a patient one night and the following morning somebody would be carrying you to the picket boat bound for the hospital ship which lay in the harbour.

Tucked up in a little white cot poor Smithy lay there unable to move, thinking to himself that if a torpedo got the ship he would have to go down with it without a struggle.

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He was too weak to knock a fly off his nose, and oh, so hungry. He'd have given a pound for a crust of bread, but the cure was to starve, and starve he did. He tried to bribe one of the stewards to bring him a crust, but there was nothing doing. It was nearly a case of good-bye Smithy, one night. His temperature rose to one thousand and the steward had to fetch the doctor out of bed in the early hours of the morning. However, he pulled through, and after two weeks he began to feel himself again, and another week saw him back at the base.

The first thing he did was to go and get a good feed from the canteen, as all he'd had was three glasses of Libby's milk and water a day.

His stay at the base was very short, and in a few hours he was packed in a car together with his baggage and sent to the Marsh, which was an aerodrome situated on the other side of the island, about six miles from the base.

It had the usual huts and tents and a few aeroplanes, but Smithy was not staying there, but was driven another four miles to the end of the Marsh, which extended to the sea.

Here he found two solitary tents, and a small hut which contained a small engine and water pump. Dumping him and his gear, the car went back, leaving him to introduce himself to the two other men that were there. One a petty officer who was in charge, and the other an ordinary airman.

They seemed very pleased to see him and made him feel at home. It appeared they had been there six months and had nobody to talk to but each other and a few Greeks that lived in the village about a mile away. 'It certainly don't look very lively here,' said Smithy looking round. All he could see was an expanse of sea and a few miles of marshy land.

'No, it's not very lively,' answered the P.O., 'but it's a cushy job and there ain't anybody to bother us.'

'Well, what do you do, anyway?' asked Smithy.

'Well, you see this ditch.'

'Yes,' said Smithy, looking at a long ditch about six feet wide.

'Well, that drains the aerodrome, and all the water which comes down is pumped with this engine over that dam into the sea.'

'It don't rain very much here, only about once a month.'

'I know that,' said the P.O., 'that's why we ain't much to do, and when it does rain we only start the engine and keep the pump going until it's all gone.'

'Oh, I see,' said Smithy, 'all we've got to do is to wait for rain.'

'That's it.'

The first thing Smithy did was to scrounge some wood and make himself a bed on four legs, on which he stretched his hammock, and by the time he'd done that, dinner was ready.

One tent was used to sleep in, and the other to grub in and to store food.

They took it in turns to fetch the food, which was issued every three days at the Marsh aerodrome. For some reason or other they always drew double rations, which meant six men's rations for the three of them, and by the time the man had carried them four miles he was ready for an hour's rest. They occupied their time as best they could. Sometimes doing a bit of digging, and sometimes running the engine to keep it from rusting away for the want of use.

One day after it had rained, the P.O. and Smithy started the engine to pump the water away. They had just got the

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pump going nicely when they noticed that the engine was beginning to go faster and faster and soon went so fast that the whole building began to rock and the water-cooling tanks that were fitted on top of some beams began to dance round and round, breaking all the joints. The P.O. had already turned the oil fuel off, but it continued to go, so he dropped his spanner and made a run for it, leaving it to blow up for all he cared, and needless to say Smithy ran with him. They both stood at a safe distance away, watching and waiting for the explosion, but as luck would have it none came, for the engine gradually began to run slower until it stopped.

On inspecting the damage done, they found the bolts that had held the engine down had pulled up out of the concrete bed and let it dance into a corner of the hut with the water tanks on top of it.

At any rate, the damage was repairable, and it gave them something to do for a day or two.

The P.O. was a nervous sort of chap, more like an old washerwoman. How the hell he got a P.O.'s rank goodness only knows, but there, that was one of the Navy's idiosyncrasies. Always after that Smithy had to start and stop the engine, because the P.O. wouldn't go near it again.

One morning Smithy took his rifle and a clip of cartridges and went along the beach, more for a bit of practice than anything else. His favourite trick was to stand a bottle on a piece of rock and try to shoot it from a distance. He had just stood the bottle up when he noticed a dark patch in the sky approaching towards him. As it got nearer he discovered it was wild duck. There must have been thousands of them all flying together.

When they were overhead, he took a pot-luck shot among

them, thinking he couldn't help but hit one, but all that came fluttering down was a few feathers, the ducks going on their way.

'Well, that's queer,' said Smithy to himself, 'I'd have bet a fiver that I'd have fetched one down.' He no sooner said that when he noticed another lot coming. Filling his magazine he waited until they were a little way off, then let fly five shots in quick succession. 'Got you that time, my beauty,' he said, as one came tumbling down and dropped into the sea. Dropping his rifle, he went in to fetch it, and found that its head was completely blown off.

He waited another hour to see if any more would come, but they didn't, so back he went to the tent with his bag.

Now one thing that P.O. could do was cook. He could disguise bully beef in a hundred different ways, in fact he could turn it into a sweet pudding. Smithy asked him where he learnt to cook and he told him that his wife couldn't cook anything worth eating, so he always had to do it when he came home from work at night so that she could warm it up for next day's dinner.

He set to straight away to pluck and draw that duck, and took such pains over it, telling the others what sort of stuffing he was going to make to go with it. In fact that was all they heard all that day until bed time. What he was going to do and how he was going to roast it.

He was pottering about long after the other two were in bed, putting the finishing touches to it, as he called it, until at last he got into bed and the lights were extinguished.

They had been asleep about an hour when Smithy, who was a very light sleeper, was awakened by snorting and growling round about the tent. Then came a crash of falling pots.

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As one man they all grabbed their revolvers and made a dive outside; there were about a dozen dogs fighting over the duck, or at any rate what remained of it.

Bang, bang, went the guns and three of them dropped, the others making off as fast as they could.

'That's the end of our to-morrow's dinner,' said Smithy.

'And after all that preparing,' said the P.O. 'Well, we might as well turn in, we can't get it back again.'

They had no sooner put the lights out when the noise of an approaching car was heard.

'I wonder who the hell this is?' said Smithy.

The car pulled up outside the tent, full of marines with rifles and fixed bayonets.

'What's going off here?' asked the sergeant in charge.

When he was told what had happened he wasn't very pleased about it.

'Fancy getting us out of bed at this time of a night.'

'We didn't ask you to come,' answered the P.O.

'No, but we heard firing going off, and the C.O. thought the Jerrys were making a landing so sent us to see what was the matter.'

'Oh, I see,' said the P.O. 'Thanks for coming anyway. Will you have a drop of rum while you're here?'

'Now, that's talking. I don't mind getting up any night for a drop of rum.'

There was enough rum to give them all three tots, as they drew six men's rations and none of them ever touched it. It simply accumulated until some of the other chaps came to visit them.

'Cheero, boys,' shouted the sergeant, as he shouted 'Home, James' to the driver.

The following day two officers arrived in a car.

'Who's in charge here?' one of them asked.

'I am, sir,' answered the P.O.

'What's all this about ducks flying around here?'

'There are plenty, sir, they come over in flocks.'

'By gad, that's good. I'm coming over to have a pop at them to-morrow.'

He was told about the time and where they flew over, and off they went.

'We don't want any officers hanging about here,' said Smithy. 'They'll be round us all day.'

The next day they turned up in a small lorry with a machine-gun mounted in the back.

They ran it to the beach and waited.

Before long the ducks were seen coming in the distance. The gun was loaded ready.

Soon they were nearly overhead, and the rat-a-tat of the machine-gun started. Among the bullets were the usual tracers, which give out fire all the way, so that it can easily be seen where the operator is directing his shots.

The spray of bullets could be seen going among them, but apart from a few feathers nothing came down.

The officers couldn't believe their own eyes.

'Well, that's a devil,' said one, 'anybody would have thought that I could not possibly have missed fetching two or three down.'

'It was your bally rotten shooting,' said the other. 'I told you to let me do the shooting.'

As they passed the tent on their way back the P.O. asked them if they had had any luck.

'No, I'm damned if I could hit them,' he said.

'Well, there were plenty to pop at, sir.'

'They couldn't have been ducks at all, they must have

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been duck ghosts. I couldn't have possibly missed hitting one if they had been real,'

'Ours was a real one, although we didn't taste it,' said the P.O.

'We'll have a go another day,' he said, and off they went.

They didn't come again, so the boys guessed that the C.O. wouldn't let them waste any more bullets.

One morning one of the Greeks who came round the tent for a chat now and then told Smithy that he was going to get married on the Saturday, and asked if all the three of them would like to go to the wedding.

The P.O. said he would have to stop in the tent in case anybody came, but Smithy and Ford could go if they wanted.

On the Saturday they put clean clothes on and polished their shoes and buttons, cleaning themselves so much that anyone would have thought they were going to get married.

The village wasn't far away, and when they arrived there they found everybody dressed up in their best Sunday clothes.

The girls wore the national costume, which was a white frilly affair, and a sort of coloured apron tied in front of them, a pair of thick white wool stockings, sandals made out of goatskin, and a white sheet over their heads, completed the picture.

The men wore the usual baggy trousers and white wool stockings, with a white shirt covered with a little waistcoat of many colours.

The people were standing in groups talking and waiting for the procession.

Soon came the sound of howling music, like fiddles in pain, and everybody rushed to the corner.

First came two men playing fiddles, then came the bridegroom with two men each side of him, holding his arms as though they were frightened he would do a bolt. Then came his family. These would suddenly burst into song, which resembled a lot of cats squalling.

Smithy and Ford followed the procession round the village streets until they came to the bride's house. Here they stopped and serenaded until she came out on to the balcony.

After singing her a few songs they moved off towards the church.

At the church door the priest awaited them, also his mates, or rather assistants, little priests, as the Greeks called them. They each had a long top hat that looked like a chimney and wore a long black gown which had seen a good deal of service. On closer examination one could see the old gentlemen had left their handkerchiefs at home and had to use their robes; either that or they had such long beards that when they drank anything it ran down their whiskers on to the gown.

One old priest made some sort of a sign with his arms and all the procession did the same. Then he turned round and went up the steps. Smithy had to smile at the old gentleman's legs, as while climbing the steps he displayed a khaki pair of puttees and a pair of hobnail army boots.

The two best men led the groom, still holding each of his arms, to a small table half way up the aisle, and there they stood for fully half an hour.

Smithy and his mate had already installed themselves in the front row of the men's side. The females all sat on one side and the men on the other, all the seats being one above the other reaching right up to the ceiling.

Then one of the officials came round with a bag full of

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little round sweets. Smithy filled his pocket and started to eat a few.

'Them's not for to eat,' said the Greek friend. 'Them's to throw at the bride and groom when wedding finished.'

'Oh,' said Smithy. 'But, blimey, they'll get hurt with these things'; some of them were as big as a full-sized pea.

All of a sudden there was a commotion, and the bride entered, followed by about a dozen girls.

'Which is the bride?' asked Smithy.

'That one against the priest,' said the Greek.

'Blimey, I thought that was her mother. She looks about ninety. Why, man, her face is a mass of wrinkles, it can't be the bride. How old is she anyway?'

'Only eighteen,' said the Greek.

'Well, don't you ask me to kiss her. She ain't tasty enough. I wouldn't mind that bit at the back of her. Who's that?'

'That's her little sister. She's only twelve.'

'Hell,' said Smithy, 'I can see you've got to catch 'em young here or else they're worn out by the time they're twenty.'

'She'll expect you to kiss her as you're a guest, and it will be an insult if you don't. It is the custom here.'

'We'll see,' said Smithy.

The ceremony began.

Two crowns of silver flowers and tinsel were produced. The priest put one on the girl's head and one on the man's, then started jabbering away in Greek. While he was making his little speech, one of the bridesmaids at the back of them was changing them over from one head to the other. This went on until the ring appeared.

The priest did the next business, which was to put it first on his finger and then on hers, for about a dozen times.

Then after another speech he pronounced them man and wife.

'Now get your sweets ready, this is where the fun begins,' said the Greek.

The priest took hold of the bride's hand and she took the groom's, and all three of them walked round the table three times whilst the people pelted them with sweets.

Smithy grabbed a handful out of his pocket and must have got a few screws and nuts mixed up with them, for when he aimed for the priest's hat he knocked it off first shot.

The pelting stopped at once, and everybody looked awed as the priest bent to pick it up. They could not see whether he was amused or wild, because his hair, which must have been four feet long and had been tucked up under his hat, was hanging all over his face.

However, he took it in fun, and after stuffing his hair back and replacing his hat, he resumed the walk round the table, taking good care to hold his hat on this time.

The Greek told Smithy afterwards that they expected to hear the priest denounce him, and order him out of the church, as they looked upon that as nothing short of sacrilege.

After the ceremony they all walked back to the bride's house and the kissing began; but Smithy had to see a man about a dog at that moment and wasn't missed.

When he returned, he found bottles of wine being handed round, each person drinking out of the bottle and passing it to the next.

The bottle was handed to Smithy, but he told them he'd already had some and handed it on. He couldn't see himself putting his mouth to that bottle when all sorts of scabby mouths and snotty whiskered chaps had touched it.

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The reception was carried on until late in the evening, singing and dancing, to the squeal of half a dozen fiddles. Then the bride went in to her house and shut the door, leaving the bridegroom to go back to his home.

'Hey,' said Smithy to him, 'what's the idea? Ain't you going to sleep with her?'

'No, not yet,' he said, 'not for a few weeks yet; you see it ain't the custom to live with the bride until a certain date'. He mentioned the name of some saint, but Smithy was too disgusted to take notice.

'Well, that's that,' he said, as he stretched himself out on his bed.

'That Greeko needn't be frightened of anybody running off with her in the meantime. If it were me I would be damn glad to be rid of her for a little longer,' and he went to sleep with a sigh of satisfaction at not being that poor Greeko.

CHAPTER XII

A TIN OF PETROL

ONE morning a car arrived to take the petty officer back to the base and Smithy was told that from then he was to take charge of the outfit. When Ford went to draw the rations he was given the same as before, which was for six men, and when he tried to explain to the purser that there were only two of them at the pumping plant he got quite annoyed and said, 'I don't care a damn how many there is there, I've got orders to issue six men's rations to the pumping station and six men's rations you've got to have. You can throw them away if you want to, but you've got to take 'em away from these stores, so that's that.'

'Well, that's better than getting nothing,' said Smithy, as he packed the grub in the mess tent. 'We'll swop some of this stuff for a chicken or eggs when we go to the village.'

But in the morning there was no grub to swop, or tent either.

It happened all in an hour. They had got down for the night in the usual way, and must have been asleep for some hours, when both were awakened by a terrific crash. The wind was blowing a gale and it was pouring with rain. In fact it wasn't pouring, it came down in a solid lump.

'Sounds as though the mess tent has gone up,' shouted Smithy.

'Light that hurricane lamp and I'll go and have a look.'

He soon came back. 'There's no tent there, and no grub, it's all blown into the sea, and this tent is nearly going the same way.'

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They both set to as best they could to make the tent a little more secure, but they might as well have stopped where they were and waited for it to go up. First one rope snapped, then another.

They shouted to each other above the howl of the hurricane.

'Get the beds rolled up while I hold the pole up, I can't hold it much longer.' Then 'biff', and a noise of tearing canvas and the tent went up in the air like a balloon, leaving the two mates clinging to their beds in the pitch dark, soaked to the skin.

'Where shall we go?' shouted Ford.

'God knows,' answered Smithy. 'There's only one place and that's the engine shed—we might squeeze in among the wheels.'

They made a dash towards it, only to discover that there wasn't a shed left. Only the engine remained standing on its bed. The water tanks had fallen, but still stood up full of water.

'Hey,' shouted Smithy, 'give me a hand to push these cursed tanks over, we can crawl in them then.' They managed to empty them, and, despite the slime and sludge, crawled inside. Morning found them huddled together, stiff and wet, but it was a beautiful day, the sun was so hot that everything steamed. They looked round the wreckage, but found nothing any good, so set off to walk to the air station.

When they arrived and reported to the C.O. he wasn't sympathetic, and even told them that they ought not to have left their posts.

'You ought to be running that pump now. How do you think we can use the aerodrome with all this water on it?'

Smithy tried to explain. At last he told them to tell the

purser to give them a new tent and all the necessary tackle, which was loaded on to the lorry and taken back.

When they arrived back, Smithy went to have a look what was happening to the water that was rushing down and, to his amazement, found that the water had washed the dam away and that it was running into the sea on its own without being pumped.

He went over to his mate, who was putting the tent up.

'Hey, Fordy, come and have a look what's going on over at the dam.'

'Well, that's queer,' said Fordy, 'and here we've been pumping and using good paraffin for nothing, when all we'd got to do was to fix a sort of gate and close it when the sea comes up.'

'Don't say anything about it to the lorry driver; he might go and snitch and that will mean losing our job, and I am just getting acclimatized.'

They soon had the tents up and fastened with ropes about an inch thick. Four main ropes were fixed from the top of the pole and fastened to four poles about four feet long driven into the ground.

Then four more fastened through an eyelet hole half-way down the tent to stop the wind from pushing the canvas in. Finally an anchor chain, which must have weighed half a ton, was run round the bottom of the skirt.

'There,' said Smithy, 'if the thing goes up now it will take the blinking island up with it.'

The next trouble was how to get rid of the paraffin which they used to run the engine on. It was no use telling them that it wasn't wanted or they would have wanted to know why, so each time a barrel arrived it was hid at the back of the engine shed.

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At last Smithy had an idea. Next time he went to the village to draw the fresh water he went to one or two houses and told them he'd got some to sell or exchange, and by the time he got back to the tent Fordy was surrounded with Greeks, each carrying bottles, etc.

They had enough eggs and chickens to keep them for a month and plenty of spare cash by that evening. They must have come from the other side of the island to get it. Smithy took good care to make his side of the business all right by telling them that if they told any of the officers or men where they got it, he would tell the officer that they had pinched it. That put the wind up them and kept their mouths closed, because they knew what the punishment was for stealing. 'Plenty stick', as Smithy called it.

One night when Smithy was outside the tent fastening up for the night, he heard a scuffle coming from the direction of the engine shed and, rushing over, found that somebody had been pinching the paraffin and had left the tap running in their hurry to get away. It was too dark to see who it was and which way they went, so he turned the tap off and went back to the tent.

Before he went to sleep he thought of a plan to catch the culprit, and the next morning they shifted the paraffin into the other tent and filled the barrel up with petrol, leaving it in the usual place.

'Now, all we've got to do is wait for results. We'll soon find out who it was.'

Not many days after there was such a flare in the direction of the village. 'There goes our petrol,' yelled Smithy, as he put his coat on. 'Come on, Fordy, let's go and see what it is.'

They found out who pinched the petrol all right. His house was a mass of flames. It was hopeless to try and put it

out, as the houses were built of mud and straw, and thatched. The pigs and fowls which lived in the basement were squealing and fluttering about; some of them managed to get out, but several were burned to death. There wasn't such a thing as insurance in that part of the globe, so the poor devil had to lose the lot.

'Now,' said Smithy, 'I know who pinched my petrol, thinking it was paraffin.'

The poor Greeko was frightened to death and stammered something in Greek. One of the Greeks standing by could speak a little English, so he told Smithy what he said.'

'He says him very sorry but he hadn't any moneys to buy.'

'Oh, so he thought he'd pinch it, eh? Tell him I'm going to tell big officer.'

At that the poor devil shook and started crying, tears running down his beard, and muttering pitifully.

'What he say?' asked Smithy.

'He say that Allah has punished him enough by setting his house on fire.'

'Well, tell him that it wasn't Allah, but petrol that did it.'

The sight of the poor devil sobbing touched Smithy so that he couldn't tease him any more.

'Tell him that I will let him off this time, but let it be a warning not to steal again.'

It was more pitiful still to see the poor devil show his gratitude by kissing Smithy's boots. 'Come on, Fordy, let's go, or I'll start to cry.'

The weeks went by and they had nothing to do but amuse themselves as best they could. Most days they played cards with the Greeks, who always went away skinned and sadder men. It was impossible for them to win, because all the cards were marked and they told each other what to play,

but it didn't keep the Greeks from coming for all that. Once when a game was in progress a Greek came rushing in to tell the others that the priest was coming towards the tent. My, didn't they scramble! One couldn't see their backsides for dust. Smithy put the cards out of sight and went to the door to greet him.

'Come in,' said Smithy, and taking his high hat the old gentlemen went in and sat on one of the beds. Smithy offered him a drink of neat rum, and didn't he like it! He had another, and still another. Then he was offered a piece of cake, which he turned over and over, then smelt it. One of the Greek boys had remained behind to do the talking.

'He says he cannot eat it because it has got pig in it.'

'How the hell does he mean, got pig in it?' said Smithy.

'It's got what you call lard in it, and that is pig, so he cannot eat it.'

'What difference does that make? Don't he like pigs?'

'We ain't supposed to eat pigs on certain days in the moon,' was the answer.

'Oh, I see,' said Smithy, 'well, give him some more rum then he'll try it.'

The old rascal must have drunk a pint of neat rum when he began to sing. 'Throw the old beggar out,' said Fordy. Fancy making that damn row. Here, have a piece of pastry then, if you won't have the cake.'

He turned that over. 'Tell him there ain't no pigs in that.'

The boy told him and he started to trough. They thought he was never going to stop. He must have stopped an hour, and when he did go several of the villagers who had come outside the tent for curiosity's sake had to damn nigh carry him home.

'Blimey, he's gone without his hat,' said Ford, as he was making his bed.

'Put it under the bed, we'll make it do for a pot,' answered Smithy.

One day it started raining and never stopped, and towards evening a strong gale blew. 'Do you think the tent will stick it all right?' asked Ford.

'I hope so,' answered Smithy, 'this gale might stop later on,' and with that they turned in for the night, hoping for the best.

No sooner had they put the lamp out than there was a noise as though someone was falling over the tent ropes.

'What the hell's that?' said Smithy as he grabbed his revolver from under his pillow.

Then they fumbled at the strings of the tent door. Fordy had just lit the lamp when a Greek forced his head through a slit. His eyes were standing out of his head. 'What the hell do you want?' asked Smithy.

'Me found a boy inside a box on the beach. Come quick me very frightened.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'Come with me and I will take you to him.'

'I bet there's a damned catch in this somewhere. Light those two hurricane lamps and bring your gun and let him lead the way.'

They put on their oilskins and gumboots and stepped outside.

The rain had stopped, and a clear moon was showing, so they could see the way they were going.

The Greek led them to some rocks along the beach. 'There he is. Me stop here, you go. Me very frightened.'

The object turned out to be a ship's raft, and lying on the

bottom was a man, face downwards and his head in the water.

'Hold this lamp while I turn him over,' said Smithy. He jumped into the raft, which was tossing about, and turned his face up. 'Poor devil,' said Smithy, 'he's a German seaman, and only a kid. He looks about eighteen.' His eyes were still open, and the sea had brushed his hair back over his head. A search through his pockets revealed nothing, there being only a few German marks in a belt which was round his waist.

'What are we going to do with him?' asked Ford.

'We'd better lift him out of this and lay him on the grass,' answered Smithy. 'He's dead right enough.'

After a bit of a struggle they got him out of the raft on to the grass. 'We'd better cover him over, or those dogs will make a meal of him before morning.'

After wrapping a piece of canvas round him and tying it round secure, they left him about a hundred yards from the tent. Poor Fordy couldn't sleep that night. Every little noise he sat up thinking that the dead bloke was waking up. In fact he was so windy it made Smithy feel a little that way as well.

The following morning he went to the base to report the matter, returning two hours after with the news that there had been a sea battle near the Dardanelles and that a German ship had been sunk, most of the crew being taken prisoners and taken to the base.

'What did the C.O. say?'

'He's going to send someone to see about it.'

'Hope he's quick about it,' said Smithy. 'We don't want a dead bloke hanging around here long. He'll soon begin to stink.'

That day passed and nobody came, and so did several more days; despite the telephoning to the base from the Marsh aerodrome nobody seemed to know what to do.

Smithy went to see the German every morning, but the climax came when on one of these morning visits he found that the dogs had uncovered the body and had eaten all the flesh off his face and hands.

What with the heat of the sun and the flies it was a sickening sight. He went back to the tent and told Ford to bring a shovel.

'I'm going to bury the poor beggar,' he said. 'If they want to identify him now they can't, so what's the use of leaving him lying there any longer.' The grave was dug and the body dropped into it. Smithy made a sort of a cross out of one of the paddles that was in the raft and stuck it in the ground.

'That's that,' said Smithy, 'and we call ourselves Christians. The least they could have done was to have brought one or two of his shipmates over to identify him and give him a decent burial.'

No more was said about it until a month or two later, and that was when the P.O. came to see them. They told him about it. 'Blimey,' he said, 'have you got a spade?'

'What do you want a spade for?' asked Smithy.

'Why, I'm going to dig him up and get his bladder for a tobacco pouch, it will make a fine souvenir.'

'Look here,' said Smithy, 'if you go near that grave I'll put a bullet through you, and I mean it.'

Evidently the P.O. thought better of it, for he didn't mention the shovel again.

One evening when they both went into the village there was singing and dancing going on. Everybody was making merry, even the priests were dancing. The maidens had

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their fiesta dresses on and the young men their fancy waistcoats. Smithy stood looking on.

The dance seemed to be a catch-as-catch-can sort of business, the men were grabbing hold of first one girl and then another, having a little dance and going to another. 'This looks all right,' said Smithy, 'I'm going to have a packet at this.'

He waited until a nice damsel came his way and grabbed her. They all stopped dancing and watched Smithy cutting a dash. He never could dance, in fact he had no idea, but he managed a Greek dance and was loudly cheered after it was finished. He hung on to the girl all the evening and made love as best he could, as she couldn't speak a word of English, finally taking her home, where, to his amazement, he found that it was there where the fire had been. The old man came to the door with a beam on his face and invited him in, patting Smithy on the back and jabbering away in Greek at the same time.

'Blimey, I'm quids in here,' thought Smithy. 'He daren't say anything for fear of me telling about the paraffin business.'

Strange to say, they became firm friends, and many a pleasant evening was spent by the side of that strange fireside.

One thing Smithy couldn't stand was the coffee they made. It was just like drinking treacle. It hung round one's chops so.

Still, it had to be drunk, especially when Adonia made it.

It soon got round the village that Adonia Constantinous was Smithy's gal, and weren't the other parents jealous when they saw Smithy rolling up with tins of bully beef and jam! Needless to say, there were Mrs. Grundys even there, and poor Adonia had a lot to put up with from their tongues.

SMITHY

But, alas, it soon came to an end, for poor little Adonia died after a very short illness. The village doctor called it a funny name which meant fever.

The funeral was the queerest ceremony that Smithy ever witnessed.

The body was laid fully dressed, even to her shoes, on a bier or crude stretcher. Flower petals were stuffed into her eyes and nose, and in her hands, which were crossed over her chest, were flowers.

The priest and choirboys arrived at the house together with the musicians. Then the procession started. The priest in front, then the fiddlers and choirboys, after that came the bier, which was carried by two men. Then came the mourners.

The procession went from street to street all round the village, the violins squealing out a mournful tune and the choir chanting in between. Round and round they went until they arrived at the church.

The bier was placed at the altar and the priest stood at the head while the mourners did a sort of dance round the corpse ending by first kissing her, then the priest's hand.

Then the body was laid in a canvas shroud and lowered into a grave.

There was no such a thing as coffins there.

When it was filled in, a lantern was lit and placed at the head, also a photo of the girl.

The cemetery was very small, and in the corner was a little hut fitted with shelves. On these shelves were bundles of bones tied up in small bags, each marked with an inscription.

It appears that the bodies were dug up again after about a year. The bones were then placed together and put on the

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shelves, awaiting the relatives to fetch them so that they could be taken home and placed in earthenware caskets. If the bones were not claimed within a certain time they were what they called scattered to the four winds, in other words thrown around the churchyard.

It was a common sight to see human bones lying about bleached by the sun.

At one time some of the aeroplane pilots had a craze for skulls as mascots and would give a good price for a good shaped head that wasn't broken, to tie on to their machines.

One day Smithy and Ford got an order for three skulls and went to the cemetery to see if they could get them.

They could not find any whole ones lying about, so they went to the little hut. By gad, when they opened the door wasn't there a stink! The flies came out like a cloud. There were stacks of bones, some of them had some flesh still on. Grabbing hold of a couple, Smithy slammed the door and made off.

'I wouldn't get another if you gave me five quid for it,' he said to the officer whom he handed them to.

This craze for having these skulls as mascots lasted for a time, but two officers who had them on their machines had a fatal crash and that put an end to them, as nobody was more superstitious in those days than an airman.

One morning a car came to take Ford away to another station. He was very sorry to go, but there it was, orders were orders, and that was that.

'Who are they going to send in his place?' asked Smithy of the driver.

'I don't know anything about that!' he said.

'Hell's delight, have I got to stop in this God forsaken hole all by myself? Why the Turks, for they're nothing else

but half Turks and half Greeks, would slit my throat if they thought I'd got a lot of grub here.'

'I'll tell the C.O. when I get back to the base,' he said.

Evening came and nobody arrived, and Smithy began to get the wind up. He didn't know what to do. If he went to the base he knew there would be no tent left in the morning, let alone stores. The lot would be raided, and if he remained it was quite likely that he'd get a knife stuck in him in the middle of the night, especially when they knew he was there alone.

Ten o'clock came and still no one arrived. He went outside to have a look round and there, wagging his tail, stood Nicko, a dog that he had made friends of by giving it bits of meat.

'Well you're better than nothing, Nicko,' he said to the dog. 'If I have you in the tent all night with me I know you'll know if anybody starts prowling around and damn soon let me know.'

The dog was enticed inside and given a lump of meat while Smithy fastened the tent up.

It was a hell of a night. The wind howling and the thoughts of a knife slashing through the side of the tent kept Smithy awake, and when dawn came he went to sleep. He stuck it for three nights and on the Saturday morning he fastened the tent and started out to the aerodrome to draw the rations, and also to tell the C.O. part of his mind.

The C.O. was amazed at his being there alone and told him that he ought to have come over straight away. 'We shouldn't have known if you'd been knifed. I'll send somebody over with you straight away,' he said.

When they arrived back at the tent they found it was open and all the grub gone with several other things, such as

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boots and a few articles of clothing. Luckily they had a new supply of food with them, so there was no shortage of that.

When Smithy explained the job to his new mate, whose name was Wood, he was delighted and said he could just about manage to do it.

As Smithy explained, 'All we have to do is to eat, sleep, walk into the village, play cards, and read. Sometimes we start the old engine up to keep it from rusting. The hardest job is to walk to the aerodrome and carry the rations back, which is twice a week.'

But all good things come to an end sooner or later, and their job came that way sooner than they wanted.

One Sunday afternoon they had visitors from the base, two men whom Smithy chummed up with. They thought they would have a walk as they hadn't anything else to do.

'Well,' asked Smithy, 'what do you know? Has the war ended yet? We shan't know when it does. In fact, if it did end they would pack up and go back to England and leave us here and forget that we ever existed.'

'Well,' one of the chaps said, 'there's a new doctor just come out from England. He's playing up hell. He says that he is going to stop all fever and disease. He's going all over the island upsetting everybody. By his orders all the huts and places are to be scrubbed out every day whether they want it or not. You ought to have heard him raving at the cooks about the mess gear. All the tent floorboards have to be taken out every morning for his inspection. I tell you he's hot.'

'Blimey, I hope he don't come here. He'd tell us to burn the place down.'

'If I was you, Smithy, I'd start and have a clean up. He's bound to find you. Why, he'll damned well smell you from over there.'

'Thanks for the compliment,' said Smithy.

Woody, who was a conscientious sort of bloke, started next morning clearing the tents up. He took the floorboards out and scrubbed them.

'Hell,' said Smithy, 'have you got the wind up, or are you frightened of losing a good job?'

'Well, you never know,' was the answer.

A fortnight went and no doctor came, so the scrubbing and tidying up business began to drop and things went back to the old routine. 'I told you he wouldn't find us,' said Smithy.

One morning they overslept themselves, and when they did get up it was getting on towards dinner time.

'Blimey,' said Smithy, looking at the watch which hung on the tent pole, 'we might as well have a good dinner and not bother with breakfast. I'll make a suet pudding and fry some kidneys that I got from the village.'

'Righto, suits me,' said Woody. The previous night's supper pots were still unwashed on the table. Smithy shoved them off and prepared to make the pudding.

'I'll go and fetch some water from the village,' said Woody.

He'd no sooner got outside than he stepped back quickly.

'There's a car coming towards us, Smithy.'

'Who's in it, can you see?'

'No, they are too far away, but they're coming this way. I bet it's that doctor. He would come when we're in this unholy mess.'

They had no time to straighten things up.

'Let's go over to the engine and get the pump going, and don't forget, if he comes over, to tell him that we've been pumping from five o'clock this morning.'

A TIN OF PETROL

They started the pump, then watched the car draw up at the tent door, through a nick in the hut.

'It's the doctor. Now we're for it.'

He got out of the car and went straight inside.

Smithy waited a few minutes, then went over.

He had just got to the tent door, when a frying pan came flying out, then a pair of old boots, and after that a loaf of old bread.

He waited until the firing had ceased, then poked his nose round the door.

'Come in,' said the doctor catching sight of him standing there.

Smithy went in.

After looking at him for a minute the doctor said: 'Are you in charge here?'

'Yes sir.'

'Oh, and what were you before the war?'

'Engineer's apprentice, sir.'

'What was your father?'

'An engineer, sir.'

'Oh, then I suppose you come from a decent family and have had a decent bringing up in comfortable circumstances.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I wonder what he's getting at,' thought Smithy. 'He seems a decent sort of a chap, and he don't seem very much annoyed.'

But Smithy's opinion soon faded into the background when the doctor took off his hat and threw it on the floor, shouting at the top of his voice:

'Then you bloody well ought to be ashamed of yourself. I've been all over the world in all sorts of places. But the

only place I can compare this with is a bloody Lascar's galley. Look here, mice dirt mixed with the rice. Jam mixed with flour. And what have we here? A piece of cheese in an old boot. A candle stuck on a loaf of bread! I suppose you'll eat that together with the fat.'

As he picked up each article he threw it outside, and ended with the remark that they were a dirty lot of swine living there in filth and laziness while he was trying to conquer fever.

'I'll report you and have you shifted at once. And oh, what's that in the frying pan?'

'Sheep's kidney, sir.'

'Let me see it.'

The pan was handed to him and he turned the contents over and over, smelling it on both sides.

'Where did you get this from?'

'The village, sir.'

'Could you get me some?'

'I'll try, sir,' said Smithy, and whistled his mate, who was busy with the engine.

'Go over to the village and get some kidney for the doctor. Tell them it's for the big officer, then they'll let you have it.'

The doctor looked at Smithy when he mentioned the big officer, and thought he was pulling his leg. But Smithy soon explained that any officer over the rank of lieutenant was big officer to the Greeks, and that they would do things for big officers that they wouldn't for little officers.

The doctor was only about five feet. That was what made him look when Smithy said big officer.

Woody came back a little later and said he couldn't get any, so Smithy had to offer him theirs, and the blighter took it. Anyway, it quietened him down a little.

'Now, I shall come over again to-morrow, and I shall expect to see everything clean and tidy. If it's not, you can look out for trouble.'

When he had gone, Woody came over to hear what had gone off. It put the wind up him and he started to muck out straight away. By the time he'd finished it certainly did look and smell a little cleaner.

'How's the kidney pudding going on, Smithy?' he asked, as he wiped his hands.

'There ain't no kidney pudding, mate, only the pudding, the kidney went when the doctor went.'

'You don't mean to say he threw that away!'

'No, he took it.'

'Well, of all the damned cheek, pinching a bloke's dinner; I hope he chokes hisself and has kidney trouble ever after.'

'And I also hope that the mice he was talking about have had young on it.'

They were ready for him the next day, but he never turned up, and didn't that day drag. They were up at seven in the morning and had cleaned up by eight.

'Look well if we have to clear out at a minute's notice. What shall we do with all this grub? It has been accumulating for weeks,' said Smithy as he surveyed the stores.

'God knows,' said Woody.

'What about an auction sale among the Greeks?' said Smithy.

'We'll let a few know when we go to the village to-night.'

They were awakened the next morning at dawn by the muttering of voices.

'Wonder who the hell they are,' said Smithy, as he poked his head out of the tent.

'Blow me if there ain't a queue of Greeks, women as well. They're waiting for the auction to start. There must be a hundred of them.'

'Hey,' shouted Smithy, 'clear off and come about ten o'clock.' But he might as well have told a flock of sheep, for they still stood there.

'Get up, Woody. We might as well get it over before breakfast, then we can get a bit of peace.'

The table was dragged out and then the goods. Talk about a grocer's shop, it wasn't in it! Tins of bully beef, jam, macaroni, lumps of bacon, cheese, tea, rice, in fact everything one could think of in the eating line.

'Bring me a hammer,' said Smithy.

'What for?' said Woody.

'To knock the goods down with of course, and you never know, I might have to use it on some of these if there's a rush. Better give me the tent mallet.'

An interpreter was soon found, under the promise of the best bargains.

The first lot was a lump of bacon.

'How much for this?' shouted Smithy. 'Come on. How much?' It was passed round, handled and sniffed at, even tasted. 'Come on. How much? I don't want the stuff back again after you've been handling it.'

'Two francs,' was shouted. 'Three', then 'four', and it was finally knocked down for six. 'Damn good start,' muttered Woody as he pocketed the money.

Sometimes when they had bought their bargains they weren't satisfied and would hold up the sale by arguing. Then Smithy would throw them a knife or spoon, anything to shut 'em up.

When they were half-way through the sale two of the

priests came, and the crowd made way for them to come to the front.

'Fetch that jar of rum,' said Smithy. 'No, wait a minute, I'll fetch it, you offer this tin of bully while I'm gone.'

Smithy found the rum, and intended to water it so as to make enough to fill two or three bottles. But on looking round he found that the only water in the tent was in the bucket that they had washed in.

'This is the only way,' said he to himself. 'I cannot go out and get clean water or they will know what it's for.' So after skimming the soap off the top he emptied it into three bottles, which were then filled up with rum.

A murmur went round the crowd when they saw them. But the trouble was that when the priests bid nobody dare bid above them, so the only thing for Smithy to do was to make out somebody was bidding, just to fetch the price up.

The three bottles fetched ten francs, amid great laughter from the crowd.

The bidding seemed to fall flat while the priests were there.

'Tell them to clear off,' said Smithy to the interpreter.

'I daren't do that,' he said.

'Well, tell them to go and put that wine in bigger bottles or they will blow off.'

Whether they believed it or not they went off at once, and the bidding began to rise again. The sale lasted nearly an hour; they sold everything they could, and for two pins Smithy would have sold one of the tents, business was so good. At last they all cleared off, mumbling and arguing over their goods.

'Now for the big share out. How much have we made?'

The total came to about six pounds in English money.

'Damn good idea of yours, Smithy,' said his mate pocketing his three pounds.

Whether the doctor reported them or not they never knew but they heard that he was down with fever the day after he paid them a visit and was on a hospital ship bound for England.

'No wonder he got fever,' said Woody, 'sniffing around in all the corners he could find. Serve him blinking well right.'

A few weeks later, several officers came over with drawings and plans. They had discovered that by building a sluice gate, which opened when the tide was out and closed when it was in, they could do away with the engine and pump. The officer in charge thought he was telling Smithy something wonderful, but needless to say Smithy didn't tell him that he had found it out months ago. They took all measurements to make the gates, and went off.

'Well, it seems to be that our time's up,' said Smithy.

After about a week the gates arrived on a lorry, complete with drawings, etc., for fixing. About fifty Greeks were engaged to do the widening and the labour. To use Smithy's language: 'The idlest lot of swine that ever lived.' They did five minutes' digging and then rested on their spades, arguing for half an hour. When told to get on with the job all they could say was: 'No savvy.' Smithy could talk quite a lot of Greek, but he learnt more swear words in the two weeks he was in charge of that job than in three years of good Greek learning.

Once while walking up the dyke he came across four of them playing at cards. This did make him wild, and he went among them with flying fists. That settled them for a while, they couldn't stand a punch under the jaw, in fact they would sooner be shot.

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At last the gates were in and a lorry came for the two pals and their gear, and there ended one of the softest jobs Smithy had in his four years of service.

About that time the R.N.A.S. and the R.F.C. were turned into one and called the R.A.F., which, in Smithy's humble opinion, was a great mistake. He said it was like trying to mix oil with water. Especially as a sub-lieutenant in the R.N.A.S. became a full lieutenant when in the R.A.F. This didn't suit the army men who retained the same rank. As regards the lower ratings, the naval men couldn't cotton to army routine, and what's more they didn't, out in those areas at least.

They were not long left alone at the base to carry on with their naval routine, for when the next boat arrived from England it carried an army officer who called himself a disciplinarian and who thought he was going to play hell.

He attended one or two parades and came to the conclusion that the men wanted drilling and route marching to smarten them up, as in his opinion they all walked about as though they were half asleep. Next day orders were sent out that every man on the station had got to do at least two hours' drill a day. The damn fool couldn't see that the reason the men slouched along was that they all had been out there for at least two years and were eaten up with fever.

After a few days things began to get hot. Machines were not got ready for flight and boats were not unloaded to time, in fact the work was getting left undone all over the camp.

The C.O. argued that the men couldn't work and drill at the same time, and he couldn't make them. It looked as though there was trouble brewing. But the situation was saved just in time by the disciplinarian going down with fever himself and having to be sent back home. It was rumoured

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that he apologized to the officers and said that he knew how the men felt now that he'd got the fever himself.

However, that put an end to all drill business, and no more army men arrived after that, at least not while Smithy was there; and if they had, he would have wriggled out of it somehow, as he always did.

CHAPTER XIII

SENTRY DUTY

ONE morning there was a rumour going around that several fellows were going on leave to England. When Smithy heard this he decided to attend parade that morning in case his name was called out. He had been abroad for about two years, so he thought that he stood a good chance. He did attend the parade, and his name was called out among a dozen others.

'Pack your kit and be ready to go aboard in half an hour,' was the order. They were ready in much less than half an hour, and after saying good-bye to their pals they marched down to the quay, where a motor boat took them to a trawler.

Smithy looked at the boat and smelt something fishy. 'Surely we aren't going to England in this packet,' he said to the P.O. in charge of the party.

'Who the hell said you were going to England?' he bel-
lowed. 'If you want to know, we're going to a nice little island about a hundred miles from here and about two from the Dardanelles, and where you'll see plenty of fireworks.'

They all looked at one another with sad faces. 'Well, of all the takedowns this takes some beating,' said Smithy, 'and we thought we were going home.'

'Look here, my lad, you'll not go home from out here until the war ends or until you get your head blown off, so you might as well make the best of things.'

'Cheerful beggar,' said Smithy *sotto voce*.

The P.O. wouldn't tell them where they were going

exactly, but Smithy wandered down to the engine-room to make friends with one of the engineers.

'Where are we bound for, mate?' he asked.

'Imbros, a small island not far the Dards — if we get there.'

'How do you mean, if we get there?'

'Well, the blasted engines are about ready to drop through the bottom of the boat. We've been stewing about among these islands for three years now without a day's leave. I thought we were going to get home once when a shell from a submarine went through the side, over the top of the engines and out the other side. It made two round holes as clean as a whistle. I nearly fell down the crank pit wondering what the hell was up.'

'That sounds interesting. What happened after that?'

'Well, we carry a small gun forward and we let 'em have it; it soon cleared off, leaving us with two extra portholes in the engine room. But I'll do it on the beggars yet; we're getting nearer England every day.'

'How do you mean?' asked Smithy.

'You see this bucket of sand? Well, every day I mix a little with the oil and it is chewing the bearings up gradually, and soon we shall have to go back to have new ones fitted.'

'It's a good idea, but you want to watch you have enough bearings left to get you to England.'

'I'll see to that all right,' he said, as he moved round to the back of his engine.

It didn't take long to reach Imbros. It proved to be another place like Thasos. A motor boat pulled alongside and took them to the pier, which was a roughly made platform projecting a few yards out to sea.

It was a beautiful place. The aerodrome couldn't be seen

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from the sea as it was surrounded by mountains. All round were the hangars or sheds, and the living quarters, etc. were made of bricks and properly built.

The bricks were made of mud and straw, which were put into little moulds and left to dry in the sun, then when the building was completed it was covered with tar to keep the rain from soaking the bricks away.

The inside was whitewashed and when completed it was quite comfortable to live in, much better than being under canvas at any rate.

Smithy was put on the flights again, which meant looking after the machines and getting up at dawn. There was no work done in the afternoons as it was too hot, so that men lay on their beds or went swimming to cool themselves.

The men were divided into two parties, which were called Port and Starboard Watch. One day it was Port's day to stop in and another it was Starboard's day, so that every other evening they were free to go where they wanted.

When it was Smithy's night off he mostly went into the village. The usual type of Greek village. It looked a picture of beauty nestling on the mountain side with the white-washed houses and red-tiled roofs, but on approaching, the usual smell of dirt and squalor.

Smithy found his way the first night and passed through the little cemetery. It surprised him to see the number of English graves with the little wooden crosses; on closer scrutiny he discovered that they were mostly pilots who had crashed near the aerodrome, it being such a dangerous place to land with all the mountains round, especially at night.

On going a little farther he came across a little shop which was different to the average Greek stall. It was kept by a Greek who could speak perfect English. He used to make

coffee and fry eggs for the fellows who went there at night to pass the evening.

It was a sad tale he told Smithy. He was the late mayor of Chanack and had seen his house burnt down by the Turks. Together with his father they had fled to Imbros with nothing but the clothes they stood in. Now he was trying to get a living out of the little shop.

At that little shop Smithy found out why some foreigners call the English pigs.

The way some of the fellows talked and treated that Greek was a disgrace. Smithy felt ashamed of his own countrymen at times and actually apologized for them. The Greek was too much of a gentleman to respond, but he must have felt like spitting in their faces. They weren't all alike. Some treated him with respect, but others like a dog.

Of all the time Smithy was out in those parts he never saw so many crashes as he did on that island. Not a week passed without a crash ending with a death.

The best of it was that it didn't seem to unnerve the other pilots in any way. They seemed to look on it as though it had to be and seemed to expect such happenings.

Often when a machine was seen to crash and burst into flames the other pilots would know who was in it and make a dash for the poor devil's hut and pinch or exchange his clothes, etc., and sometimes they would have the cheek to run over to the wreck in the dead man's boots.

'Well,' they said, 'it's all in the game, it might be our turn to crash next.'

They kept one of the old-fashioned Ford motors on the aerodrome, fitted with first-aid gadgets, and when a machine crashed it went straight for it, making a bee line over hedges and over ditches and sometimes up a mountain side, any way

for the quickest. If it got stuck the men on it, never less than a dozen, would pick it up and carry it over the obstruction.

It was impossible to get very near when the machines caught fire as the heat exploded the cartridges and sometimes the bombs which were carried under the chassis, so all they could do was to watch the poor devils waving their arms, trying to free themselves until they waved no more.

It was at that station Smithy nearly said good-bye to this world. The machines that he had to look after were small scouts and carried a machine-gun mounted in front, operated by the pilot from the cockpit by pulling a pump up which, when released, would force itself back.

The machines were only about seven feet high and the barrel of the gun was fixed so that the bullets went through the propeller, in other words, as each blade went past the gun would fire in between before the next came round.

One particular machine had just returned from a flight and it was Smithy's duty to scour each cylinder with paraffin to clean the old oil out. To do this he had to stand in front of the machine and turn the propeller over, and whilst doing this the machine gun went 'rat-rat-rat'. The bullets just went through the top of his hat. If he'd stood six foot instead of five foot eight this book would never have been written. The men came rushing into the shed when they heard the gun, to see what was the matter.

'Some fool left the gun in gear and I nearly got it,' said Smithy.

There was hell to pay, but it was never discovered who had done it. It taught Smithy a lesson; he always looked to see whether the gun was out of gear before he swung the propeller round again.

The men on the station were not overworked, and all

sorts of sport was arranged. Swimming was very popular, and prizes were offered for different achievements, such as swimming to another small island which looked about a quarter of a mile away but was really about four miles. A crowd would dive in and race, a motor boat going along with them to pick up those that were exhausted. The first to land would receive a pound.

Sometimes football matches were arranged between the airmen and the sailors off one of the boats. Then there would be fishing matches. There were all kinds of funny fishes, from flying fish to octopus. The Greeks loved to catch these as they were considered a luxury when boiled. They would come out with a tentacle in one hand and a lump of brown bread in the other. They would gnaw at the gristly suckers and smack their chops over it.

Once while walking over some rocks Smithy fell into a water hole between the rocks, and when he pulled his foot out he was horrified to see an octopus clinging round his ankle. It came out of the water before it let go and then slid back under the rocks. When the Greeks were told they came in dozens to catch it, moving rock after rock until they found it. It was three feet long and when it was killed they took it to the village and the same evening a feast was held. Smithy was asked to attend, but he politely refused.

One day the C.O. organized a raid somewhere round Constantinople. It was arranged that two seaplanes were to go bombing in relays, and instead of returning to the seaplane base were to load up with petrol and bombs on the other side of the island, where a dozen men would be sent to do it.

Smithy was one of the selected, and together they went round on a trawler. When they turned the corner it looked

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as though they were on top of the Dardanelles, it seemed as if a stone could be thrown at the forts. They all stood on the deck admiring the view, when all of a sudden a loud whistling sound was heard, then a hell of a bang near by. The old trawler rocked and dipped and shivered. So did the men. The Turks had spotted them from the other side and were shelling as fast as they could.

A small boat was lowered, and they managed to reach some rocks behind which they lay. It seemed hours as they lay there not knowing what to do, when all of a sudden the drone of an aero engine was heard in the distance.

'Hell and damnation,' said Smithy, 'are they going to bomb us as well?'

The droning came nearer and nearer until the plane came into sight.

'Thank God, it's one of ours,' said the P.O. in charge.

The machine went right over to the other side, and there was a loud report. It sounded as though a dozen bombs were dropped at once, it was so loud. Anyway, there was no more shelling, so after a while they carried on with the job of unloading the trawler. The raid turned out a success, and when the boys arrived back at the base they said that they had heard the shelling and guessed what was happening, so loaded an aerial torpedo on to one of the machines. The pilot reported a direct hit on one of the heavy guns, which was a great event, as the Turks used to run their guns on lines which ran into the mountains so as to conceal them from aircraft. But that time they didn't run them back in time.

The dark evenings lasted about six weeks, and the men spent their time playing cards and reading any books they could get hold of.

Many a pound was lost and won in an evening, and the chaps that got skinned out didn't get much sympathy either. All they got was the information that there were plenty of pistols in the armoury. When Smithy got skinned he generally managed to make enough money to set himself up for the next evening. One way was to build beds with spring mattresses. The springs were replaced by the elastic from the aeroplane chassis. There was always a sale to be made among the officers, despite the elastic cutting into their backs. Anyone could make the beds, but they couldn't get the elastic and Smithy wouldn't tell for the world; he ain't going to divulge it here either. But he got it when he wanted it. Another method of making a bob or two was to make Greek slippers. These were made out of goat skin and drawn together with string. They were very comfortable and warm. He learnt how to make these from old Yann, his late Greek pal. A good pair fetched five bob. The skins were pinched from the village. Going round at night Smithy would spot a waterbag made of skin, hanging outside one of the houses. It didn't hang there any longer, that's all.

After sticking to the old routine for a few months, Smithy began to want a change, and on weighing things up came to the conclusion that the only good job on the camp was the blacksmith's. Many a time Smithy had envied him his job when he had seen him standing watching the rest of the fellows dashing after the machines as they landed. All he did was to lean on his big hammer and make tea over his fire, which two Greek labourers kept going for him.

Smithy had no idea of ever getting that job, but he did get it, very soon. It happened that the football team of which

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the blacksmith was goalkeeper had a match which was to be played on a small island about twenty miles away. The usual patrol ship took them on board, together with half the men in the camp. The sea was very rough at the time and they hadn't got far out when several of the fellows were heaving their hearts out over the ship's side. The blacksmith was one of the first, and during his heavings he was unfortunate enough to heave his false teeth over at the same time, with the result he had to go to Malta a few days after to have some more fitted. The usual cry went round on the parade: 'Can anybody here do blacksmithing?'

'Yes, sir, I can,' sang out Smithy, and that's how he got the job.

'Report at my office,' said the engineer.

'Now, Smith,' he said, 'I've lost a very good man and I must have another; if you cannot satisfy me I shall have to send to the base for another. Do you think you can manage?'

'Yes, sir,' said Smithy. 'I can forge anything from a pin to a battleship.'

'You seem pretty confident about it at any rate. I'll give you a job to do and if it's all right the job's yours.'

The job turned out to be a stand for a souvenir that he had made. He had a sketch made, and sent it to be made at once.

'Blimy,' said Smithy, as he looked at the drawing, 'there's plenty of twists and curls on it. I might be able to make it with clay, but I'm beggared if I can tackle it out of a lump of iron.'

The Greek labourers were decent chaps and got a good fire ready. After several attempts, first burning the iron, then breaking it where it didn't want breaking, Smithy was about giving it up as a bad job and looking forward to the

sack, when one of the Greeks began to laugh and jabber away in Greek to the other.

'What in thundering hell's the matter with you?' Smithy asked.

'You sit down, Smit, and I will make it for you.'

Smithy looked at him and finally gave him the tools.

The bracket gradually began to take form and Smithy marvelled at the man's skill.

'That will do for one side, Smit, will it not?' he asked, smiling.

'Damn good, I didn't think you knew how to do blacksmithing.'

'The other boy that was here before you, he couldn't blacksmith. I done all the work and him sit down and smoke. When officer come I give him tools and I blow fire, and he thinks other boy's work good.'

'Well, that's a good one,' said Smithy, 'and everybody used to praise his work.'

'Look out, officer coming,' said the other Greek, whose only duty seemed to be look-out man. The Greek handed Smithy the tools and went to the bellows.

'How's the job getting on Smithy?' said the officer coming in.

'All right, sir. A bit tricky these curls, but I'm getting on all right.'

'My, that's fine. Simpson couldn't have done it any better,' he said, examining the finished half. 'If you do the other half as good as that you'll do.' And off he went.

The tools changed hands again and Smithy sat down to a smoke.

During the dinner hour Smithy collected as much grub and cigarettes as he could and gave them to the Greek,

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who nearly fell on his knees and kissed him. 'Simpson no good blacksmith at all. Me did all the work and him do all jaw. Him never give me a smoke or anything.' Smithy could see that he had made friends for life and knew that his job was safe. It was too good to last, not having to get up in the morning at dawn and no parades. But it lasted until Smithy's name was on the board for England a few weeks later.

About half a dozen, including Smithy, boarded the trawler bound for the base. On their arrival there they were billeted in tents to await the boat for Malta, the first step towards England. The days went on until it turned into weeks, and during that time an epidemic of 'flu broke out. Half the camp were down with it and several men died.

The day before the boat came in Smithy caught the 'flu and he knew damn well that if the doctor discovered it there would be no England for him, on that boat at any rate. They were told to parade before the doctor the next morning for medical examination.

'Well, that's done it,' said Smithy to his mates. 'He won't pass me, and that means another month in this blasted hole, until the next boat.'

'Look here,' said one of the fellows, 'Why don't you get a basin full of hot rum and milk down you to-night and I bet by to-morrow you'll be all right.'

'It would poison me,' said Smithy. 'You know I don't take the stuff.'

'Well, make yourself take it.'

'Damned if I don't try.'

That evening he went round to all his mates and told them he had decided to get drunk, and asked them for their ration of rum just for that night. Altogether he collected

about ten, these he put into a saucepan with a pint of milk. 'I think I'd better get in bed before I start drinking,' he said, 'or I shan't know where the bed is.'

By the time he had got into bed the rum and milk was hot, then he sat up and supped it. By the time he'd drank half his head seemed to rise out of his body and float about the tent, and by the time he'd finished he hadn't got a head, it was dead to the world.

The trick worked, and the next morning when he had to pass the doctor he got through all right.

That night, while on board the boat, the sea air cut Smithy's throat and he had to wrap a stocking round his nose and mouth to warm the air before he could breathe. And to add to the cheerfulness two chaps died of 'flu in the night.

They arrived at Malta safely, despite several scares. Submarines had sunk a hospital ship the day before and were reported to be following the boat.

After being taken off they were taken to the rest camp, which was situated on the other side of the island, and a poor looking crowd they looked too, sniffing and sneezing.

After a day or two of beautiful sunshine and comfortable surroundings the men got a bit of life back into them and things were more cheerful. Malta may well be called the land of plenty. One could get everything one wanted there and cheap too, that is, if he could drive a good bargain. The first impression Smithy got was of Bible land, such as the pictures he used to see when a child, of people walking about in white robes and hoods in sun-drenched alleys and gateways with palm trees here and there. But on nearing the town, Valetta, with its modern shops and cafés, he soon came back to civilization.

SENTRY DUTY

Three of the boys palled together, one a Yorkshireman, one a Cockney, and Smithy from the Midlands. The first one's name was Bill, and a proper Bill he was too, with his Yorkshire accent. The other was Tom, a son of a well-known London photographer. He stood about five feet high and made up for it in assurance. He walked round as though he didn't care a brass button for anybody or anything.

It was their first night out on leave; parade was at ten o'clock in the morning.

There were about twelve on that parade, and what a parade! Talk about Fred Karno's navy, it wasn't in it.

There they stood, some with no shirts on, others with their toes poking out of their shoes. Overcoats were torn and covered with mud and grease. The smartly attired officer looked aghast. 'I can't let you go out like this,' he said. 'I know you have done your best, but it's damn bad. Haven't we got any clothing of any sort?' he said, turning to the P.O.

'No, sir.'

'Well, I don't know what to do. I certainly daren't let them go out looking a sight like this.'

He was a good sort and understood the disappointment the men would feel, this being their first chance of leave for about three years.

'Well, men,' he said, 'there's only one way out of the fix, and that is to split you up into two parties. If you all get together and lend one another clothing . . . what I mean is, if one man hasn't got a good pair of boots and has a good overcoat the two could build a decent outfit out of two bad ones. Then he can go out to-day and the other man to-morrow.'

Everyone thought that was a good idea and started to swop about straight away, with the result that it was a funnier parade than before. Some had boots several sizes too large for them and others had coats too short or too long, but at any rate they all looked respectable and were allowed to go out.

The three pals managed to keep together, and as they passed outside the road was blocked with Maltese, who owned small carriages pulled by underfed horses.

The carriages were called *croxis* and were like the old-fashioned open victoria, only the cabby couldn't see his passengers if he looked round. There were no doors either side, which happened to be very convenient, as you will see.

The boys were at once attacked on all sides by the cabbies, who offered to take them a nice drive round the town and then to a nice girl, 'Very nice, very clean, plenty up here, plenty down'.

Then the price was argued, one cabby offered to do it for five francs and another for four, and so on.

All the time they were following the boys, pulling the horse along the gutter while they were arguing. One collared hold of Bill, who threatened to punch him over the jaw if he didn't take his dirty paws off him.

'Oh, clear out,' he said. 'I don't want a woman. I want some't to eat.'

Then came another storm, 'Me take you to good café where there is plenty good music while you feed'.

'That sounds better,' said Tom, 'how much to take us into town?'

'Five francs, Johnny,' said the cabby.

'Why, you old twister, you said five francs at the camp and we've walked two miles now.'

'Four francs.'

'Now, look here, mate. We don't want to buy your outfit, we only want a ride in it.'

'Look here,' said Smithy. 'We'll give you two francs.'

'Me got horse to buy food for and plenty children at home.'

'You don't call that a horse, do you? It's more like the case of one; and you don't look as though you could make a white rabbit let alone a kid.'

At last it was agreed that he would do it for one and a half francs, and they jumped in and laid themselves out like dukes.

'Home now to town, James,' said Bill, as he tilted his hat on one side.

It took about a quarter of an hour to get to the town. The cabby took the long way round, and they learnt after that they could have walked the whole way in ten minutes.

'The old swindler,' said Bill, 'I'll have my own back on him.'

They arrived at the café door in style, and when the cabby pulled up, a chap in a coat with tails, complete with shirt front, and it was only a shirt front, because when he did the bowing and scraping business it came out of his waistcoat, showing a grey army shirt underneath, bowed them all the way to their seats, then clapped his hands, bringing two more waiters on the scene.

They all sat down with their hats and coats on, but before they knew what was happening their hats were snatched off by the waiters, who also tried to remove their coats.

'Hey,' shouted Bill, 'what the hell do you think I am, a blinking queeny? I can take my own coat off if I want to. I know you, it will all go on the blinking bill. To dinner and attendance, etc. I know.'

'But, sir, this gentleman's café. Ladies and gentlemen come here in evening dress.'

'Oh, do they?' answered Bill. 'Well, listen, old cock, this is my morning, afternoon, and night dress, and sometimes I use it as a blanket. Now hop it and bring the grub, toot sweet, there's a good fellow.'

At one end of the room a girl was trying to thump a tune out of a piano, while another played the fiddle. The tune was meant to be, 'Many brave hearts are asleep in the deep', and Bill told the waiter that the instruments ought to be at the bottom of the sea as well.

'Tell 'em to play something lively, some dance music.'

When the dance music was being played several sailors grabbed hold of the waitresses and waltzed round the tables.

Smithy's and Tom's grub came first, brought in by a nice little girl in a very short skirt and yards of silk stocking. She put down the plates, and was away again before Bill could pass any remark to her.

'By gum, ain't she nice!' he said. 'Watch me get off with her when she brings mine.'

The other two had nearly eaten their lot by the time Bill got his. They were content with what was on the menu, but Bill would have some Yorkshire pudding. He said it made him feel nearer home.

Eventually it came, brought in by a fat old woman dressed like a flapper.

'There you are, deary,' she said.

'Hell, my appetite's gone already,' was all he said.

After a while Bill spotted his girl dancing with a sailor.

'Oh, so that's why she couldn't bring it, was it!' And without a word to the other two he got up and went over to the couple dancing.

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'Let's get him back,' said Tom, 'or there'll be trouble.'

But it soon ended, and Bill brought her back with him to the table. There she sat on his knee, stroking his hair.

After their dinner they ordered a cup of tea.

'By gum,' said Smithy, 'that's the best tea I've tasted since I left home; it tastes quite different when it ain't got grease and onion floating about on top.'

It took them all their time to drag Bill away, but he came quickly when he asked her what she wanted for a bit of love.

'Blimy, they must think we're blinking bookies the way they open their mouths.'

They spent the rest of the day seeing the sights. The only trouble was that they hadn't much money among them.

Tom came to the rescue as regards the money problem. He suddenly found out that by cabling to England he could get some money from the Maltese branch of his bank.

'When it comes,' he said, 'I'm going to take you chaps and give you a treat. We'll go to the opera and then dinner. Then we'll find a nice little girl apiece. And I'll pay for the lot.'

'Right, let it be quick then,' said Smithy.

The weeks dragged on and the C.O. must have begun to get sick of seeing them idling about doing nothing but eat and sleep, because he gradually began to give them duties, such as guarding the gates and cleaning up.

The guard consisted of standing at the gate with a rifle and fixed bayonet, saluting officers, etc., also doing a little walk to the other gate now and then.

None of the men had ever done any rifle drill before, and some hadn't even held one, so the pantomime started when Smithy and Bill were detailed to do guard one evening.

They went to the gates and told the sentries already there

that they had come to relieve them. The rifles were handed over without ceremony, also the belts and equipment.

'Now, what have we got to do?' asked Bill.

'You ain't got to do anything, only walk to that post now and then. If a civilian comes you stop him and ask him what he wants, and if an officer comes you just salute him like this.' He did a movement ending up with a pat on the magazine of the rifle. 'But if a general or some other big bug comes you present arms.' 'What's that?' asked Bill. He bumped the rifle up and down and shifted his feet somehow and then stood still.

'Blimey, let's hope a general don't come, that's all,' said Bill.

'Well, if one does come you want to get going the other way and pretend not to see him, that's all,' said Smithy.

Smithy's gate was one end and Bill's was round the corner, so every now and then they met half-way, each trying to be smarter than the other. Smithy was standing at ease when all of a sudden Bill came running round the corner.

'What the hell's up?' asked Smithy.

'How the hell do you tell the difference between a general and another officer?'

'I don't know,' said Smithy, 'I've only seen 'em in pictures. They generally have a sort of crossed Indian clubs on their hat. But you'll soon know when a general's about. They generally have about a dozen officers following them about, carrying their gloves and so on.'

Poor Bill went back, feeling not very satisfied with the explanation. Smithy did one or two little marches, when he spotted an officer coming his way. He waited until he nearly got up to him then did a right about turn and marched the other way. But he didn't get far before he heard the

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words: 'Sentry, halt!' barked out. He turned round and looked suprised to see an officer there, and gave a nice salute smartly.

The officer didn't return the salute but stood and glared.

'Do you mind doing that again?' he said. Smithy did it again, only a little smarter as he thought.

'What in hell do you call that?' asked the officer.

'A salute, sir. That's how I was told to do it.'

'Do you mean to tell me you don't know who I am and what rank I hold!'

'No, sir. I don't know the uniform of an army officer, I am a naval man.'

'Oh, so you're a navy man are you! What the devil are you supposed to be doing anyway?'

'Sentry duty, sir.'

'Sentry duty, eh! And might I ask what you are supposed to be guarding?'

'That door, sir.'

'My God, and are we dependent on you for protection during the night? You don't even know how to handle a rifle. Do you happen to know which end the bullets come out?'

'I've never done any rifle drill before. In fact I've never had one in my hands before.'

That put the lid on things. He raved and stamped his feet, sweating blood. 'You've never handled a rifle before and here you are standing on guard at a barracks in foreign parts. Well, what good are you? Answer me that.'

'No good at this job, sir. I'm an engineer, not a soldier.'

'Thank God you're not, or it would be God help England.'

He went off towards Bill muttering something about damn fools.

He stopped Bill as he was walking towards Smithy.

'And are you another ornament?' he asked.

Bill looked at him daft and said nothing.

'Well, say something, man. Don't stand there gaping at me like a damn fool. Supposing I was a German, what would you do about it?'

'I should shout Smithy — I mean the other sentry, sir.'

'Then I'd knock the pair of you down like tin soldiers. What do you call that thing in your hand?'

'A gun, sir.'

'Good God, am I in a lunatic asylum? A gun! Have you ever heard of a rifle?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well that's a rifle you've got there, not a gun. I should imagine the only gun you could manage would be a pop gun. Hand it to me, and I'll show you how to salute an officer.'

Bill, who didn't know that to hand a rifle over to anybody was as good as signing his death warrant, handed it over as soft as grease.

'Now, you didn't know I was a German, did you? And I'm going to stick your own bayonet through you like this.'

He made a plunge as though he meant it, but Bill was off like a shot, running like hell up the parade ground. By that time a crowd had gathered round trying to laugh, but not daring to. The officer, who was a commander or something, turned to another junior and barked out some commands, then went off.

In a short time two marines came and took the job on, and there was no more sentry duty for the airmen after that.

THE SKELETON

THERE was only one snag being at Malta, one had to have plenty of money, and that was what the three boys hadn't got, nor could they see a chance of making any. None of them had any decent clothing to raise a little on, and if they had they'd never have found a client, because everybody was in the same boat. They even put a chit in to see the C.O., but he said he could not help them. One morning they went out with about two francs among them, hoping to get about a bit on the cheap, but they found out that they were in the wrong place. Malta is the only place in the world where there are no Jews and that is because they couldn't get a living. The Maltese are a thousand times worse than the Jews at making a deal.

They were greeted at the gate by the usual cabby, 'Take you for a nice ride, Johnny.'

'How much to Valetta?' asked Bill.

'Five francs.'

'Right. Let's get in,' said Bill to his mates.

'Who's going to pay?' said Tom. 'We ain't got that much between us.'

'Leave it to me,' said Bill. 'I owe that beggar a grudge and now he's going to get it.'

They got in, and the cabby got on his box, whipping his old horse to a trot.

'Now,' said Bill, 'when we get near the town we can hop out while he's going and he won't know, it will serve him right too.'

They did hop out, and left the poor old cabby trotting on, thinking what a good charge he'd got. After walking about the town they came across a chapel called the Chapel of Bones.

'This looks interesting,' said Smithy, 'let's go in and have a look round.'

A priest met them at the door, and started telling them the tale of how the bones got there, in a voice so pitiful and poetry-like that it seemed he had repeated the tale thousands of times, which he had to for the benefit of his pocket.

It was only a very small room and would hold about twenty people. All round were shelves stacked with human bones.

One shelf was packed with thigh bones, another with arms and legs, and on the bottom were hundreds of skulls grinning up at them. The altar was decorated with finger bones, and inscriptions were made out of teeth, etc.

The priest went on to tell them that they were the bones of a regiment of soldiers who were defending some part of Malta and got wiped out to a man, and the bones were all picked up and brought there, where a service was held once a year for them. He pointed out a particular skull which had a bullet hole in it. This was supposed to be the captain of the regiment and his skull was put in an honoured place on the altar.

He went on telling the tale, but Smithy didn't catch any more. His attention was attracted by the movements of Bill, who was helping himself to a few of the bones. But he did hear the priest say that times were hard nowadays and could they help him to keep going. Tom gave him half a franc and thanked him. They trooped out, glad to get a breath of fresh air.

THE SKELETON

'What the hell was you up to Bill?' asked Smithy; 'pinching them bones?'

'I'll show you when we get round this corner.'

He started emptying his pockets. First a skull, then a couple of thigh bones which he'd got stuffed down his trousers. Then a few ox tail bones, as he called them, which were back bones really. The blighter had helped himself to one of everything until he'd got a complete man without the meat.

'What the devil do you want them things for?' asked Smithy. 'They're no good to you. What's the use of carting them about?'

'I'm going to sell them,' he said.

'You silly devil, who do you think you're going to sell them to in Malta? You might sell them in England, but anyone will know where you got them from here.'

'Well, I bet you a bob I sell them in less than an hour. In fact I've got to sell them to buy some grub, I'm damned hungry. I'm going to get a quid for these, my lad.'

'How?' asked Tom.

'Now, listen, and then tell me if I'm daft. There are a lot of American sailors walking about that have come off those cruisers lying in the harbour. Well they're lousy with money and will give anything for a souvenir, the grimmer it is the more it will appeal to them. I'm going to tell them that it is the skeleton of a German I've fetched down, and you'll see them scramble for it at any price so that they can take it home, and say they killed him.'

'Well, it sounds all right, but we've got to see.'

They waited until a boat load of American sailors came ashore, then followed them into a café. Meanwhile, Bill had found some paper and wrapped the bones together. The

parcel was placed on the edge of the table so that it could easily be knocked off. The eating started, the three pals having ordered a good feed on the strength of the business coming off.

'Pass my cigarette case out of my pocket, will you, Smithy?' said Bill, reaching over as though to get it himself.

Bang went the bones on the floor. The paper tore and they scattered.

Oh, boy, you should have seen those Yanks stare as Bill was picking them up!

'How's this for a good souvenir?' said Bill to one of them who sat with his eyes sticking out of his head. 'It's a German I shot down in an aeroplane. He got burnt to death and I collected his bones out of the wreckage.'

'What are you going to do with 'em?' asked the Yank.

'I'm going to send them home to England by parcel. One of your officers offered me a quid for it, but I wouldn't take it. I reckon it's worth more, don't you? It ain't often you get a souvenir like this one.'

By this time they had all left their seats to come round Bill.

'Do you want to sell it then, brother?'

'Well, I ain't hard up, but I want more than a quid.'

'I'll give you two for it,' said one.

'Well, I don't like parting with it, but you can have it if you want it.'

The parcel changed hands and the money was handed over. 'Well we'll be going now. Cheero chaps.'

'Come on, let's get away from here quickly,' said Smithy, 'in case they try piecing the dam thing together and find one leg longer than the other.' Bill was so bucked with his idea that he wanted to go back to the chapel and pinch another consignment of bones. However, they managed to keep

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him from going, and carried on with their sightseeing expedition.

They eventually came across a beautiful church built of marble. Outside, at the foot of the steps, were the usual beggars seeking alms in such a pitiful voice that it took a hard-hearted man to refuse them. They all three went inside to have a look round.

The floors were all done in mosaic work, and on the walls were hung pictures which were real masterpieces worth thousands of pounds.

'You'd better not try to shove one of these up your waistcoat,' whispered Smithy to Bill.

'I was just wondering why they are always coming round the camp cadging for the poor of Malta when they could sell one of these pictures and raise enough money to keep them for a year or more,' answered Bill.

'You'd better ask the parson that. Perhaps he could tell you,' said Tom.

They found several churches the same, all filled with priceless things. At one of them there used to be gates made of pure gold, but it seems they were pinched by some king that raided the island, so they had to be replaced with iron ones gilded with goldleaf.

They had enough of churches, so wended their way to the catacombs, which are underground caverns cut out of solid rock. These were wonderful things to see. The guide who explained them said that a very small race of people used to live down them and never saw daylight, even when they died they were buried in a coffin cut out of the rock and covered with another slab of rock. Smithy and his friends soon got fed up being underground and were glad when they saw sunshine once again.

The next place they went to was one of the small villages where the peasants made lace by hand.

It was wonderful the way it was done, on a sort of big cushion; sometimes it took a year to make a small necklet. The only way you could be sure of a genuine piece of Maltese lace was to buy it from these peasants. The shops were full of it, but most of it came from Nottingham.

As they were returning to the camp they came across the old cabman, who recognized them and started swearing and cursing, asking for his five francs.

'Hop it,' said Bill.

'Me no hop it, me tell officer at camp, him make you pay.'

He followed them half-way to the camp, threatening what he was going to do, and by that time a crowd of airmen had gathered together.

'Are you going back?' said Bill.

'No,' answered the cabby.

With nothing more said the horse was taken out of the shafts and the *croxie* was turned over on its side.

He left his cab there and followed until he got to the gates of the camp.

'What do you want?' asked the sentry.

'Me want to see big officer.'

'Well, you can't see him, so hop it while you're safe.'

He made to push his way through, but the sentry shoved his bayonet against his belly, so the poor old cabby thought it best to go back to his cab.

The following morning the mail arrived from England, and Tom received a notice that he could get some money from the Maltese bank.

'Now I'll show you chaps. I'm going to take you to the opera house to-night and then dinner at my expense.'

THE SKELETON

'Good old Tom,' shouted Smithy and Bill.

'I think I'd sooner go and see that little wench at the cafe,' said Bill.

'You can go and see her after,' said Tom.

'That suits me,' said Bill.

That afternoon Tom drew twenty pounds out of the bank. They all went and had a light tea, then proceeded to the opera house.

They went up the steps, which were covered with a luxurious carpet. 'God,' said Bill, 'this would make a damn good bed.'

'Shut up,' said Tom, 'you're among the élite now.'

Inside the vestibule were admirals, generals, and American officers with their wives and daughters, maybe somebody else's, all poshed up in evening dress, lounging about drinking champagne and smoking fat cigars.

'Blimey, I feel a bit out of place here,' said Smithy to Tom.

'My money's as good as theirs, ain't it?' said Tom.

'I know, but look what a sight we look in these filthy clothes, we ought to have gone into the gallery.'

'I'll soon show you where we're going,' he said, moving towards the paybox.

'Three of the best seats in the house,' he shouted. Everybody turned to look at him. 'Thank you,' he said, as the tickets were handed to him.

They went up a few steps, and at the top were two flunkys dressed in silk knee breeches and wig with a pigtail hanging.

Tom took off his old overcoat and hat and gave it to one of them, who took it between his fingers like a dirty pocket handkerchief.

Bill and Smithy took their own to the cloakroom, not having the cheek to hand them over.

They were shown to their seats and sat there for about ten minutes.

'When is it going to start?' said Bill. 'I'm getting dry.'

'So am I,' said Tom, 'let's go and try one.'

Tom wanted to pay, but Bill wouldn't hear of it. 'I've got that dough what I got for them bones and we're going to spend it together,' he said.

To pacify him they let him pay, but he didn't half moan about the price of them and told the waiter that he wasn't going to give him a tip as he must have already put it on the price of the drinks.

While they were having their drinks two American naval officers came and sat at the same table. They must have held high rank, because their arms and hats were covered with gold braid.

They ordered drinks and cigars, and when the cigars came they handed the box to the three pals, who, needless to say, took one each.

They gradually got into conversation, and seemed very interested in the Flying Corps. They paid for several drinks and refused one in return. They sat there yarning until the cigars were smoked away and Bill put the lid on things, to Tom's disgust, by handing a crumpled up dirty packet of Woodbines to the officers.

The officers took one and lit up without a sign of embarrassment, but when Bill handed Tom one he gave him a freezing look and a kick on the shin under the table.

When they got to their seats Tom said: 'Ain't you got no sense of proportion, Bill?'

'How do you mean,' said Bill, 'wot's that?'

'You don't mean to say you don't know what sense of proportion means, do you?'

THE SKELETON

'I don't, what is it anyway?'

'Well, if you gave me a Woodbine and I gave you a Robin, that would be equal. They're both worth the same.'

'Well, what about it?' asked Bill.

'Those officers gave us a cigar worth about a couple of bob and then you have the cheek to offer them a Woodbine worth a farthing.'

'Well, I hadn't got any cigars to offer 'em, and besides my Woodbines were worth as much to me as their cigars were to them, so I reckon that is sense of proportion as you call it.'

'Oh, pipe down and listen a while to the singing,' said Smithy.

'What's the good of listening to this? We don't know what they're singing about, it's all Dutch to me,' answered Bill. 'And about this sense of . . .'

'Do you mind being quiet,' said a flunkey who had walked up behind them silently.

After keeping quiet for another half hour they decided to go, it being too highbrow for Bill, who was thinking more about the girl at the café. The flunkey fetched the hats and coats, hoping to get a tip, but all he got was a sour look.

'Now we'll go to your café and get something to eat,' said Tom, as they moved off in that direction.

After the supper Bill sloped off on his own and remained away for about half an hour. When he finally turned up he wore a sad expression.

'What's up with you?' asked Smithy. 'Ain't you enjoyed yourself?'

'Aye, but somebody pinched my wallet while I was there, or perhaps I lost it before I went in.'

'And perhaps you didn't,' said Tom.

'The old woman upstairs played hell with me because I

couldn't pay, so I told her I'd leave my wrist watch until I brought the money. I thought perhaps you would lend it to me, Tom.'

'How much does she want?'

'Ten francs.'

'Hell, you can get married for less than that. Here you are,' said Tom as he handed over the ten francs. 'By the way, is the watch worth ten francs?'

'It damn well is, it is solid gold,' said Bill walking off.

By the time they got outside it was nearly midnight and they decided to get a cab back to the camp. They found the cab rank, but there was only one cab there and the owner was nowhere to be found.

'Well, we ain't stopping here all night, so let's take it. We can leave it near the camp and he'll find it.'

'I'll drive,' said Bill. 'I know all about horses. I used to have a milk round at home.'

'That ain't a hoss,' said Smithy. 'That's a bag of bones and wants careful handling.'

'Righto, hop in,' said Bill, as he mounted the box. It took that horse some time to start, but when it did, oh boy, didn't it shift! Talk about a fire engine, it wasn't in it. Old Bill certainly knew where to tickle it with the whip.

'I bet that hoss never went so fast in its life before and never will again,' said Tom, as they swayed about. In fact they were undecided whether to make a jump for it or whether to stick it.

'Hey,' shouted Tom, as they took a corner on two wheels. 'Take your time a bit.'

'You're all right. This 'ere hoss has only got two speeds, slow and fast, and you don't want to go as though you were at a funeral do you?'

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'I wouldn't mind if it were your funeral,' shouted Tom.

They eventually arrived near the camp and out they got.

'We'll fasten the hoss to these rails,' said Bill, putting a rug over its back. 'I don't suppose the old cabby will be long in finding it.'

They didn't hear any more about it, so the owner must have decided that it wasn't worth while complaining.

Everywhere was pitch dark when they arrived in their tent.

'Strike a match,' said Tom.

'Wait a minute,' said Billy, 'I've got two little oil lamps in my pocket, I'll light them.'

'Where the hell did you get them?' asked Smithy.

'I pinched them from that café. They were standing in the corners of the staircase when I came down, so thought they would come in handy.'

'You didn't put that wench in your pocket, by any chance?' asked Tom.

'Pipe down,' came a voice from outside the tent, which sounded like the P.O.'s and they piped down.

Their sailing orders came at last, and with bags and gear they boarded the steamer. When they were outside the harbour they seemed to be going back the same way as they came.

'It looks fishy to me,' said Smithy. 'I believe they are taking us back to Mudros.'

'Hey, mate,' shouted Tom to a sailor, 'where are we going to? This ain't the way to England.'

'Course it ain't,' he answered. 'We're going to Italy, to Taranto. You're going home by train, overland.'

'Oh,' said Smithy, a little doubtful.

They were landed at Taranto and taken to another rest

camp and told to be ready at a minute's notice to board the train.

'That's done it,' said Smithy. 'It ain't worth risking breaking camp to go into the town and have a look round. The train won't wait for us.'

They hadn't been there two hours when they were packed in cattle trucks and proceeding up the coast of Italy towards England.

The journey was slow and uncomfortable and it soon got on their nerves, being shunted into sidings for about an hour at a time to let fast trains pass.

The weather was damp and cold, so they managed to get buckets which were hanging up at various stations in case of fire, and knock holes into them. The charcoal they pinched from stacks on the side of the rail road. But it was a question which was worse, the smoke from the fire or the cold. It was all right when the train was moving, because the buckets were hung outside to catch the draught and brought inside when red hot.

When the train pulled into a siding alongside a goods train there was a scramble to board it to see what was inside the trucks to pinch. Sometimes there would be hampers of fruit and dates. The boys didn't stop to open them but carried the whole case to their own truck and opened it whilst they were on the way again. It was funny to see their faces when they found out they'd pinched a case of fish or potatoes. Smithy struck lucky one day by collecting a box of turkish delight. The goods were generally swopped round with the other trucks. Oranges for apples and fish for bananas and so on. Things that were not exchangeable were dumped along the way.

After they had been on the way two days things began to

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get a little boring, so Smithy suggested that they could get off the train at the next town and forget to catch it. It would be an easy job to catch a fast train a few hours later and catch the transport train at a station farther up.

'It sounds all right,' said Tom, 'but what will the fare be?'

'We shan't have to pay any fare. We can make some excuse, say we missed it.'

They eventually arrived at Milan, and when the train moved off after a short stop it went without Smithy & Co. It was early morning when they deserted and the whole day was spent sightseeing. Every time they changed a shilling they got thousands of small bits of paper which the Italians called lire. They had no idea what the people charged or what change they got, and by the time they were ready to go to the station their silver was gone, but they had pockets full of notes.

'I reckon by the looks of all this paper we've got enough money to buy the bloody train, let alone pay our fare,' said Bill.

They happened to come across an Italian who could speak English while they were on the station, so he put them on the right train, which was going the same way as the other.

'We'd better keep a look out for the lads,' said Tom. 'We shall see them shunted into some siding, then we can get out at the next station and wait for them.'

After sitting there for about an hour without seeing anything of the other train the door of the carriage was slid open and the ticket inspector came in. He muttered something that they didn't understand and held out his hand for the tickets.

'We belong to the train that is carrying the troops in front and we missed it, so we're trying to catch it up,' said Bill.

All he got back was a gabble of language.

'No savvy,' said Bill.

Another gabble and he shoved his hand out to Bill.

'I tell you, no savvy, Johnny, and if you stick your hand out to me again I'll spit in it.'

The inspector waved his hand and yelled out some more Dutch. 'Oh, hop it,' said Bill, 'we belong to the British army and we don't have to have tickets.' The inspector bloke gave it up and cleared off.

'There you are,' said Bill, 'you've got me to thank again for getting you out of a fix.'

He no sooner got the words out of his mouth when in came the inspector with another bloke who, by the look of him, owned the railway.

'He's here again,' said Bill, 'and brought the blinking king with him.'

They both started gabbling away together.

'Oh I'm going to the lavatory until they've gone,' said Bill. And out he went.

Then Smithy tried to explain by drawing a train on a piece of paper. 'Savvy,' said the inspector, 'me savvy.'

Then Smithy drew a little box on the side of the lines, which was meant to be a latrine. 'No savvy,' said the man.

Then Smithy started doing the actions which one does when going to such places. That did it; the inspector went red in the face and clenched his fists. He thought Smithy was calling him what he'd drawn on the paper.

He raised his voice and gabbled so loud that an army officer who was passing through the corridor stopped and asked what was the matter.

'It's like this, sir,' said Smithy. 'We were on the troop train and whilst it was stopped some of us went to the latrine and

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when we got back the train had gone and left us, so we had to catch this to catch up the other.'

'Oh, I see. You're sure you didn't lose it on purpose?'

'By gum, no sir, not when we're on our way home after being away for three years. Besides none of us has got any money to buy food or anything.'

The officer, who could speak perfect Italian by the sound of him, turned to the official and jabbered away for a few minutes.

'He says that he thought you were trying to take a rise out of him, but he understands now and apologizes for losing his temper. You will catch the train up in about half an hour and he will come and tell you when to get off.'

The inspector patted Smithy on the back and smiled, and gave him and Tom a large cigar, leaving them smoking there in peace.

When Bill came back he looked from one to the other. 'How did you go on with them?'

'It only takes a gentleman to understand a gentleman,' said Smithy, puffing away at his cigar.

They caught the other train and carried on as though nothing had happened. The chaps in their truck didn't mind, because they shared the three rations between them, in fact they seemed sorry when the three of them climbed into the truck.

At last they arrived at Le Havre and were taken to another camp, which was similar to the other rest camps, but a little more strict.

Here they were deloused, in other words, washed, steamed, and half cooked. The first part of the programme was to strip under the eye of an officer and get into a bath of hot water, or rather a trough, which held about a dozen men.

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Their clothes were taken away and hung on hangers, these were put on trolleys, which were pushed into large ovens and left there for about half an hour to cook.

After the bath they were given clean underclothing, the old being destroyed, then they were given their outer clothes, which were red hot from being in the ovens.

On passing out they were given a card on which was the information: 'The bearer So and So, has been deloused and is now fit to mix among other persons.' Name and number on the bottom of the card.

They were also informed that if anyone lost that ticket he wouldn't be allowed to go on board the ship.

Smithy didn't lose his, and he didn't lose his lice, because he found several when he got home after getting demobbed.

In the excitement of getting their railway tickets for their home towns, also their demobilization papers, the three pals were lost in the rush and didn't have a chance to say good-bye.

When Smithy was asked if he'd go through it again he answered:

'I won't say yes, because I have responsibilities now which I hadn't then; and I won't say no, as a chance to see real life doesn't come into an ordinary man's life every day. But that chapter in my life will live for ever in my memory.'

PART THREE

SMITHY'S RETURN
TO CIVIL LIFE AND AFTER

CHAPTER I

DEMOBBED

It was the usual thing for a chap, when he was demobbed, to have two or three weeks' holiday and then get settled down to civil routine. Smithy did all that and more. His first thought was to buy a motor cycle with the money his mother had saved for him, and that cycle, according to his mother, was his ruination, as you will from time to time read.

The old soldier's gag as regards sleeping in a proper bed wasn't practised by Smithy. He took to his bed all right, straight away, and didn't have to get out and sleep on the floor because he wasn't used to it. All his pre-war friends had either got killed or married. One was as bad as the other, according to Smithy at that time. So he was glad when his father got him a job in a starch works where he himself was the engineer.

The job suited him all right, as there was no discipline whatever, and there were two labourers to help with the heavy work. The engineers' workshop was situated at one end of the works, entirely by itself, and the only means of access was across a yard.

The small room partitioned off was turned into a mess room, where a large fire was kept going all the winter. A small window overlooked the yard, at which one of the labourers sat to give warning if one of the bosses was coming.

If one did come, the usual signal, 'look out', was given, and all news and racing journals were hidden under the table-

cloth, which consisted of brown paper bags used for packing starch.

When the boss came into the shop all would be working hard at the bench or forge.

One of the bosses, who called himself the manager, hated the sight of the engineers' section, but hadn't the authority to sack any of them. All the machinery in the works was always kept in perfect order, so unless something unusual happened they were not fetched into the mill. At intervals Smithy's father would say: 'You'd better take a hammer and a couple of spanners and walk round, and take good care that Moses, as the manager was called, sees you.'

Smithy's father had been there a number of years and ruled his section with an iron hand, letting nobody interfere with his routine. If he happened to be working on one particular job it was God help the fellow who came to tell him to go to another.

The language that was thrown at Moses made Smithy blush, and that took some doing, when he said: 'All you've got your son here for is to teach him his trade and we're paying him wages for it.'

And he wasn't far wrong when he said that either, for Smithy's father spent hours teaching him how to use different machines, and he wasn't an easy teacher either. More than once when young Smithy had done a job the old man would come and look at it, turn it round and say: 'You've made a fine mess of that,' and for two pins would have flung it at his head.

The old timekeeper who had served his time in the service, and wore commissionaire's uniform, nearly committed suicide once when he'd had words with the old man over some emery paper.

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It happened like this. When bits of things like files, saw blades, emery cloth, etc., were wanted, they had to go to the timekeeper for an order, which he had to write out and get signed. Then Smithy or one of the labourers would go to one of the dealers and purchase whatever it was. On this occasion some emery cloth was wanted and Smithy went for the order. Either Dolly, as he was called, didn't feel very well that day or he had orders to be careful, because he at once began to question Smithy as to what he wanted it for and why did he want so much at a time.

'We want it for cleaning some shafting,' said Smithy.

'Well you'll have to wait until I've packed this parcel up,' he said.

It must have been a quarter of an hour Smithy waited, because the old man happened to come past the office, and spotted him still standing there.

'What are you waiting there for?' he asked.

'Dolly wants to know what you want the emery paper for.'

'What the hell's it got to do with him? Where is he?'

'He's just gone into the other office.'

'Oh he has, has he! I'll wait until he comes out.'

After waiting about five minutes old Dolly came out, and was at once met with a mouthful of abuse.

'What about this emery paper I sent for, Dolly?'

'The boss says I've got to know what everything that is ordered is for?'

'What do you think it's for? To wipe my backside on?'

'There's no need to be rude about it, Mr. Smith,' he said.

'Orders are orders.'

'If I told you what it was for you wouldn't understand, no more would the boss, so give him the order now and be quick about it.'

Poor old Dolly didn't know what to say or do and stood there looking at Smith and son.

'Come on,' said the old man, 'what's the matter with you, are you deaf or dumb?'

'I've spent twenty-five years in the service and ten here and I've never been abused and spoken to as you do to me,' said Dolly. 'You cannot speak a civil word.'

'No, you old scrounger, when you'd finished your time in the army they blinking well ought to have shot you like they do the old horses. You ain't any use nor ornament any more.'

That did it. Poor old Dolly nearly cried as he wrote out the order, without another word.

Smithy's father was very quick tempered and it was woe betide anybody who crossed him. Even the boss had to be careful what he said to him. Often while Smithy was working with him he would curse and abuse him just if he happened to hand him the wrong tool.

Once they were working down a deep well where several large water pumps were working. It was pitch dark and Smithy was holding a lighted candle for him to see by. The old man wasn't in the best of tempers and neither of them had spoken a word until Smithy noticed something crawling up the wall. Instead of holding the light down so that the old man could see, he held it up so that he could see what it was crawling.

'Can you see what I'm doing?' asked the old man, in such a nice manner that Smithy thought he was teaching him something and wanted him to look carefully.

'No,' he answered.

'Well, how the damnation hell do you think I can?' was the retort.

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It came out so sudden that Smithy dropped the candle and they were both groping about in the dark.

'You silly young devil, what did you do that for?'

'I couldn't help it, I dropped it.'

'Well, make haste and light it; do you think you're on a picnic?'

'I haven't got a match, have you?'

'There's some in my jacket hanging on that pipe against the steps.'

'Wait a minute, I'd better get them myself or you will be falling down the Splash into the well,' went on the old man to himself.

'Where are you, dad?' asked Smithy.

'Down the well, where you ought to be.'

The well wasn't far down to water level, so he climbed up the pipes and reached the top just as Smithy struck a match.

It took them a week before they became talkative again, so you can see for yourself what sort of a training Smithy had, even if his father was his boss.

Now and again he took his motor cycle to work, and that meant no work for the boss that day. It is a mistake to say his motor cycle; if the boss had taken a good look at it he would have found half belonged to him, because Smithy spent hours fitting and making all sorts of gadgets for it.

The manager once remarked that about the only things young Smith bought for his motor cycle were the tyres, and it was a pity that some of the lorry tyres didn't fit it.

One pal of the boss thought the world of Smithy, and even got him rises in his salary, but only Smithy himself knew why.

It was his job to wind the clock up every Saturday. It

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was a large double-faced clock and had huge weights and pendulum, which hung in a sort of large cupboard.

One Saturday he went to do the winding, and opened the cupboard door, there to discover that gentleman with his arms round one of the work girls.

Of course he slammed the door to quickly, with the result he discovered five more shillings in his wage packet.

For several years Smithy worked for that firm, until a strike started among the workers, which ended in himself, together with several others, getting suspended.

Smithy went on the dole and at that time drew one pound a week and only had to sign on twice. It was a hateful job, and one thing he feared was that some of his girl friends would see him standing in the queue. His parents were good and let him have that for spending money, so that he was able to go for runs on the motor cycle.

'Never mind, my lad,' said his mother, 'it isn't your fault; enjoy yourself.' He did enjoy himself for a while, but the easy life didn't appeal to him long. Not only that, but he was always getting into trouble.

Twice he was pinched for riding with a girl on his motor cycle with her skirts hiding the rear number plate.

The first time he went into court he thought he was in a Sunday school, everybody looked so sad and talked in whispers.

'Silence in the court,' shouted somebody, and everybody stood up until three old fogies came on the platform and sat down. When they had settled down everybody else sat.

The first charge was read out and after a short argument the chap was fined one pound.

The next had to pay two pounds and costs. And strange to say the next was fined three pounds.

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'Blimey,' whispered Smithy to his pal, who was sitting next to him, 'he's caning 'em, I hope he don't go up a quid every time.'

'Alexander Smith.'

'Stand in that box,' said a copper, 'and keep your mouth shut, you'll come off better.'

'You are charged with riding a motor vehicle with the rear number plate obscured on such and such a day. Have you anything to say?'

'Yes, sir. How could I tell that the girl's clothes were hiding it?'

'Buzz, buzz, buzz,' whispered the old cronies, with their heads together.

One of them said in an undertone: 'He didn't know,' and Smithy began to feel a little hopeful until he heard the old devil with a beard down to his knees say, 'I don't like the noisy things, they're a nuisance'.

Then his heart sank.

'Hm,' said the old devil as he cleared his throat, 'you should have told your passenger to have been more careful. You will be fined ten shillings.'

'But I didn't . . .'

'Shut up,' said the copper who was standing at his side, giving him a kick on the calf at the same time.

Three days after, the old devil died suddenly. 'Serve him right,' said Smithy when he heard, 'he ought to have died last week instead, I might have been ten bob better off then.'

The second time he was pinched for the same offence it cost him a pound, with the remark, 'If you come here again for this offence you will be fined the maximum, which is ten pounds'.

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Smithy hasn't been again up to now and ain't likely to, because he's finished with motor cycles now.

One night when Smithy had decided to have an evening in, a loud knock came at the door.

'Who on earth is that?' said his mother, as she got up to answer.

'Is this Smith's?' came a man's voice.

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Smith.

'Have you got a son who rides a motor cycle?'

'Yes, you mean Alex.'

'That's him, the young devil. He's had my daughter on the back of his motor and I want to know what he's going to do about it?'

'Do about what?' said Mrs. Smith.

'He knows, ask him,' said the man.

The worst came into Mrs. Smith's head. She thought that his daughter had got into trouble.

'Alex,' she shouted, 'come here.' But Alex had sloped.

'I'm sure it wasn't him, he wouldn't do such a thing,' she said.

'Well, I tell you it was him, and he's got to pay for the damage. I'll have a bill made out and it will be sent here, and if you don't pay I'll take it to court.'

'A bill, what do you mean? What's the bill for?'

'A new costume and a set of false teeth which she only had last week.'

A sigh of relief escaped Mrs. Smith's lips. 'Thank God it isn't that sort of trouble,' flashed through her mind.

'I still don't understand what you are talking about,' she said.

'Well, it's like this. My daughter went for a ride on the back of his motor cycle and she fell off and tore her clothes

and broke her false teeth, and all I want to know is, what is he going to do about it?’

‘He won’t do anything about it, and all I can say is she deserved to fall off. She didn’t ought to have gone . . .’

‘Yes, I know that, but he asked her.’

‘But he didn’t make her, and that’s her own affair.’

‘All right,’ said the man, ‘I’ll put it into other hands’; and off he went.

Nothing was heard of the affair afterwards, except from Smithy’s father, and that was only in a few words.

‘I should get rid of that damned bike if I were you.’

But Smithy would sooner have parted with his soul than his bike, so he kept it and persuaded his mate to buy one so that they could go out on these girling expeditions.

Time went on and Smithy’s dole went on as well. He still drew his quid every week and even had the cheek to go on his motor bike, which at that time was a luxury, to draw it.

One fellow spoke to him about it one day, but he quickly got his answer.

‘Yes, and I shall be coming in a motor car soon.’

With his expert knowledge of motor cycles he soon had fellows bringing them for him to repair, so a shed in the back-yard was cleaned out and a bench fixed up. They rolled up in plenty until it was too much trouble to wash his hands to go and sign on.

Of course, when winter came round trade began to fall off, so he had to sign on regular again. Altogether he was on about three years and only once had to go to one of the committee meetings. Things weren’t so strict at that time and Smithy soon told the old fogies who sat round a table that he had been through three and a half years of hell for them and

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that he expected them to do something for him. He went on for another year after that.

The only trouble with him was that he seemed to be working like hell amongst grime and filth and not making much money.

'You don't charge 'em enough,' said his father. 'You want to get into a real garage and get to know the routine and the charges.'

That set Smithy thinking, and he decided to try at one of the big garages in the district.

'What garage experience have you had?' asked the foreman.

'Well, to tell you the truth I haven't had any, only my service experience.'

'That don't count for much,' was the sharp retort.

'Well, I can use my tools,' pleaded Smithy.

'How much money do you want?' said the foreman.

'Give me what you think I'm worth,' cheerfully answered Smithy.

'Well, that sounds fair enough. Start in the morning.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Smithy, and went home with a light heart.

CHAPTER II

A BROKEN CRANKSHAFT

THE first job Smithy was given was a highly skilled one, concerned with an internal combustion engine, and took two days. The foreman came and looked on now and again without passing any remark, but when the job was finished he examined it and said, 'I'll give you the full rate of wages, but you mustn't say anything to the other chaps, because they have been here a long time and they don't get full pay yet.'

'Righto, thank you,' said Smithy.

The only thing that bothered him was that he had never driven a car, and knew sooner or later he would be called upon to drive.

He had told the foreman before he got the job that he could, and that seemed to go in his favour.

It came one morning. Smithy generally managed to slink out of the way when a customer came and wanted his car fetched round from the basement to the front, but this time a parson came and Smithy didn't know that he'd got a car.

'Smith,' shouted the foreman, 'go round and bring Mr. Brown's car to the front.'

'That's done it,' said Smithy to himself, 'but I'll have a go if I smash the thing up and myself as well.'

One thing he thought as he went round to the basement, 'If that meek and mild old beggar can drive, I'm damned sure I can.'

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Now mind you, he knew all about a car and what all the controls were for, but he hadn't been at the wheel before, so with a do-it-or-burst feeling he got in it and drove, and before he knew what had happened he glided up outside the front entrance as though he'd been at it for years. Out he got and stepped on air, to ask the parson if he wanted any petrol. Months passed, and Smithy got into the whys and wherefores of the motor business, also how easy it was to do a bit of twisting, in fact the twisting was done on so great a scale that he began to think he ought to be doing a little twisting for his own pocket.

One job came in and it was that job that decided Smithy to keep in the motor trade.

One day a large car drove up, and a smartly dressed chauffeur got out and opened the door for a fat and wealthy old gentleman to alight. All the chaps stopped to look, it was such a lovely car.

'Blimey, the Duke of Cannot has arrived,' said Smithy.

The old gentleman was one of those who knew everything, or rather thought he knew, and soon told the foreman what was the matter with his car. If he had kept his thoughts to himself he would have saved himself fifty pounds, so Smithy advises anyone who should read this, if he owns a car and something goes wrong with it, to tell the repairers that the car is not running as it should, and would they please look at it, rather than to go and say, 'I think it is so and so', and be fleeced the same as the above gentleman who said he knew. This is what happened.

'Where is the foreman?' he inquired of Smithy, who had gone out to see what he wanted.

'I'll fetch him, sir, he's in the workshop.'

When he arrived, the old gentleman said: 'Will you

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listen to my engine, it's making a fearful noise, I think I've broken the crankshaft.'

The foreman went out and listened, 'I don't think it's your crankshaft that's gone, sir, it sounds more like a big end bearing to me'.

'Nonsense, my man, a big end wouldn't make such a noise as that. I've had too much experience with cars to mistake that noise. I tell you it's a broken crankshaft. And I daren't go any farther with it, so will you take the engine down and then fetch me for inspection.'

'Very good, sir, I'll get on with it at once.'

The engine was quickly dismantled and examined, and all that was the matter with it was the big end nuts had come loose.

Smithy did the job, and when it was cleaned ready for the foreman's inspection that gentleman was fetched.

'I knew damn well it was only a big end, and that old beggar stuck me out it was his crankshaft; so it will be his crankshaft,' he said, going into the office to tell the boss all about it.

To cut a long story short, the crankshaft was taken out and a broken one of the same type that they happened to have in the stores was put in its place.

The clever old gentleman was sent for to inspect his engine and seemed quite pleased that he'd got one over the foreman.

'Ah,' he said, 'didn't I tell you what it was. Now, when can you get another through from the makers?'

'In about a week,' said the foreman. 'I suppose you know they are very expensive, sir.'

'Oh, yes, I had one go in my other car, that's how I knew this had gone by the sound of the bumping. You see, you

don't know it all,' he said, as he patted the foreman on the back and bade him good morning.

The following week Smithy removed the broken one, put the original back again, and completed the job, which came to about fifty pounds.

Soon after that Smithy gave his notice in. He had learnt quite enough of the ways and means of the motor business.

He soon found a small workshop with a big yard to it and fixed a sign up to the effect that he was a Motor and General Engineer.

The first breakdown job he got was to go about twenty miles. The owner of the car was a local grocer and postmaster who was taking his family a tour round the lakes.

When Smithy arrived on the scene, he found a large, old French car, and sitting on the grass with his boots off, was the owner as comfortable and unconcerned as could be, making some tea.

The reader must realize that at that time garages were few and far between and the roads weren't properly made, and to pull up in a country village was to cause a commotion among the inhabitants.

A crowd of yokels were standing round patting and feeling the body, passing remarks such as: 'How do it go without hosses, Garge?'

'What's the matter?' asked Smithy of the owner.

'I don't know,' was the answer, 'we were going along all right when suddenly there was a bang and crash underneath and I thought I'd better stop. It's a good job there was a telephone near, so that I could ring you up.'

'Well, let's have a look,' said Smithy, as he began taking the floor boards out.

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'Blimey, you've broken your gearbox brackets and the damn things are hanging out of the chassis.'

'Well, can't you fasten it in with some wire or something?'

'It wouldn't last you a mile if I did that.'

'Well you must do something about it, because I'm loaded up for my holidays and I'm not going back.'

There happened to be a blacksmith in the village and Smithy got him to make some iron straps, that were nearly as heavy as the car itself, and very crude; with these he bolted the gearbox back into its position and announced that the car was ready for a trial.

By this time it was getting dusk and the ladies with their bonnets and veils jumped into the rear while the owner was groping about the grass.

'Come on, Will,' one of the ladies shouted, 'it will be dark before we get to Doncaster.' 'I've lost my cigarette holder,' came a muffled voice from under the tree where they had been picnicking.

He searched until it was dark, then took the oil lamps off the car, lit them and searched again. He simply wouldn't start until he found it.

'We'd better stop at one of these farmhouses for the night. Then I can get up early in the morning and have another search,' he said, coming towards the car, limping as though he was lame.

'What's the matter with your foot, Will?' asked his wife.

'Oh, nothing, I think it's a stone or something in my boot. Here, hold this lamp while I look what it is,' he said to Smithy. 'Well, that's a devil, I'm blowed if the darn thing wasn't in my boot all the time,' he said, holding the thing up for them to see.

The car gave a spit and a bang, then sprang to life.

'I'll follow you for a mile just to see that you're all right,' shouted Smithy. They went merrily along for a mile or two and everything was all right, so Smithy stopped and watched the tail light out of sight.

'Well, I'm blowed,' said Smithy to himself. 'Ain't he got a nerve'.

'I wouldn't like to go five yards in that blinking bus as it is, I'm damn certain he won't get far.'

But he was wrong, they went five hundred miles altogether and never had the slightest bit of trouble.

The little garage began to thrive, and Smithy was offered a chassis which was very cheap and in very good order.

After consulting his father it was bought and overhauled, ready to have a body fitted.

My word, wasn't young Smith proud as he was testing it on the road!

His father sat on the back, while Smithy sat on a box at the wheel. He went so fast that the radiator boiled and steam shot up in the air as high as the houses.

When they got back to the yard he jumped from the box.

'There, what do you think of that dad?'

'It was all right, only why the hell did you keep spitting, it was all blowing to the back and I was getting it in my face, you dirty young devil.'

'I wasn't spitting, it was from the radiator.'

'Oh, I thought it was you, especially when you kept turning your head round.'

A body was found that would fit, and soon it was turned into a large touring car.

The next thing to be done was to have some cards printed: 'Car for hire.' 'Parties taken to the sea, etc.' 'Moderate

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charges.' And oh, wasn't that old car doomed to see some life!

The first job that Smithy had with the old car was to take a man and his wife to get married. This sounds very funny doesn't it; but that's the order that Smithy's mother took at the door.

'Is the taxi man in?' was the question he asked when Mrs. Smith went to the door in answer to a loud hammering.

'No, he's not in just now, but can you leave a message?'

'Yes, tell him to be at No. — Union Road at ten in the morning. I want him to take me and the missus to get married.'

The car rolled up at the stated time. The man came to the door, half drunk.

'Come in, my lad. Sit down and have one while the missus is getting ready.'

'I don't drink,' answered Smithy.

'Oh, don't you! Well, if you don't now you will when you're married, it makes you anyway; have a cigar,' and he handed Smithy a box. If there was one thing Smithy liked it was a cigar, and by the time the couple were ready he'd helped himself to about a dozen while the old man wasn't looking.

'You know where the registrar's place is, don't you?' he asked.

'Yes, opposite the university, isn't it?'

They arrived there without any trouble. Smithy wouldn't have been surprised if the body had fallen off, as it was the first time out.

'You'd better come in with us. They'll want you as a witness.'

It seemed so funny seeing these two, who had been living

together for about ten years, standing like a shy young couple, waiting to get wed.

'I must have another witness,' said the registrar.

'Oh, dear,' said the old man, 'I've only got this man,' indicating Smithy.

'Will anyone do?' asked Smithy.

'Yes, anybody will do as long as he can sign his name.'

'Half a mo, I'll go and find somebody out of the street,' said Smithy as he dashed out.

An old man very much down at the heels happened to be passing the door.

'Hey mister,' shouted Smithy, 'will you come in here and be a witness to a wedding.'

'Hey?' said the old fellow. 'Speak up, I'm a bit deaf.'

'Will you be a witness to a bloke's wedding in there?' shouted Smithy in his earhole.

'Well, I've done many things in my life, but I ain't done nowt like that afore,' he said.

'Come on, then, the bloke will see you all right,' and he was dragged in.

After the ceremony the old fellow congratulated the couple in his way, and received a couple of bob for his trouble.

'Well, well,' he muttered, as he shuffled out, 'that's the quickest two bob I've ever earnt in my life, the old woman will be pleased.'

'Get out, you silly old beggar, what do you want to tell her for? Keep it to yourself,' shouted the groom.

For the following few years that the groom lived he was one of Smithy's best clients, but never paid a bill without moaning about it.

'Would you take a party of five on a fishing trip?' was the question Smithy was asked one day.

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'Yes, certainly, when do you want to go?'

'To-morrow at five o'clock; it is about fifty miles there.'

The price the man suggested staggered Smithy; if it had been left to him it would have been half the amount.

The party met next morning at a public house.

The rods and baskets were loaded, also a case or two of beer and whisky.

Every ten miles the order was given to pull up. Then the bottles were opened; by the time they got there they were in a merry mood.

'Aren't you going to fish?' one of them asked Smithy.

'Am I hell! It's too dozy a game for me.'

'You wait until you see us pulling 'em out, my lad. You'll want to borrow a rod.'

While they were fishing Smithy did a small repair or two, then wandered down the banks of the river for a walk, and a profitable walk it was. He found dozens of eggs in small holes that chickens had scratched. On the way back, he saw the rods hanging out over the stream, but no fishermen. Something was tugging away at one, and Smithy lifted the rod up to find a large bream on the hook. He shouted like hell, but nobody came, so he managed to land it. He was so excited that he couldn't resist sitting down and holding one of the other rods. Down the float went, and he caught a large eel.

'Blimey,' he said to himself, 'and I thought it was a dozy game.'

There is no need to tell you where the fishermen were, but they stopped there until dusk and it was too dark to fish any longer.

These trips came once a fortnight, and by gum, didn't Smithy look forward to them! He set himself up with a

brand new rod and tackle, and has been a keen fisherman ever since.

Then there were seaside parties. For two or three years in the summer Smithy took people and fetched them back. But one journey fed him up so much that he stopped going altogether.

A woman came to book the car just for a day trip. 'There's four of us wants to go,' she said. 'How much will you charge us?'

Smithy could see that she was not very well off, so agreed to a cut price.

He arrived at the address early on the Saturday morning and found all the neighbours on their doorsteps to give the lucky ones a good send off.

The first woman to come out must have weighed twenty stones, for the car went on one side and the running board creaked when she stepped on to it. Then followed the other three, each one carrying a brawling kid. After they packed themselves in four school kids climbed in.

'My God,' said Smithy, 'How many more is there to come?'

'Only the dog, it will be something for the kids to play with.' Then a man brought out a damn great mongrel which looked as though it had never had a wash since it was born. This was placed on the woman's lap that was sitting in the front with Smithy.

'You'll have to give me more room,' said Smithy. 'I can't get at the gear lever.'

'Let me sit on the back of the seat,' said the fat one, and she climbed over the back and sat with her great backside hanging over poor Smithy's neck, making him lean well over the wheel.

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They got going amid great cheers and waving of handkerchiefs.

All went well for the first twenty miles until they came to a sharp turning. Then bang, bang went two of the tyres, which caused the car to swerve and the women to scream.

'You'll all have to get out for a bit while I mend the punctures,' said Smithy, as he surveyed the damage. There were no such things as spare wheels in those days, at least only on posh cars.

The weight had caused the car to roll off the tyres, so you may guess what sort of a puncture there was to mend in each wheel.

What with the questions of the kids and the old women moaning about the lost time, by the time they were ready to start again Smithy wasn't in a very sweet temper, especially when he had to get out and blow one of them up every ten miles.

By the time they got to a signpost that said ten miles to the sea the kids were asleep, and the women began to speak cheerfully to one another because nobody had said a cheerful word, after the punctures, for several miles.

At last they arrived and unloaded. The old car seemed to utter a sigh of relief, and Smithy did when he left them, after telling them to be back at a certain time so that they could get back by daylight. (No such luxury as electric head-lamps.)

At the appointed time for departure there was no signs of the mob, and Smithy began to get restless. 'God knows how we shall get home in the dark,' he thought.

They eventually arrived, in oddments, until the last woman turned up with tears in her eyes.

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'I've lost our Sally and can't find her anywhere,' she said.

'Here's a do, another free hour's daylight gone,' said Smithy.

However, the kid turned up soon after and they packed themselves in.

After the first forty miles it began to get dark, and they had another forty to do. As luck would have it the tyres were holding up all right. Smithy had blown them up nearly to bursting point.

Darkness came all of a sudden. There was no moon. The only light was from two oil lamps that might as well have not been there for all the light they gave.

He had to drop to about ten miles per hour.

All of a sudden a large tree loomed up in front of them and Smithy pulled up dead, shooting one passenger on to another. Then screams and blasphemy rang out.

'Where the hell are we?' said Smithy. 'We've taken the wrong road.' He spotted a light and went over to a cottage to ask where they were.

'Why, you've come ten miles out of your way,' said the man at the house. 'You'll have to go back until you come to a forked road, then turn left.'

Smithy turned the car round, saying nothing to the women about being ten miles off the road.

Off they went again, and eventually got on the right road.

Eventually the lights of Nottingham loomed in the distance; he gave a sigh and sent up a silent prayer.

Husbands and neighbours were outside to greet them home, but there was no gossiping, they went straight in their houses and shut the doors. Smithy, who had been paid before the journey, drove off as fast as he could towards home.

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Before he took the next job it took him all one morning to clean the car out. Fried fish and chips, winkles, babies' dirty napkins, were only a few of the things trampled into the mats and rugs. 'Never again,' said Smithy, and he kept his word for a month or two at any rate.

Sometimes he got very good tips besides the fare, but the best he ever had was double fare. He'd booked an order to take four people to Leamington Spa, and while on the journey came upon a nice long road; naturally he put on a bit of speed. The speedometer was at forty-five and they were just going to overtake a steam wagon laden with stones, when all of a sudden, without any warning, the wagon suddenly turned right and was making for a gateway over a small bridge spanning a ditch. Smithy had no time to pull up, so the only chance he had was to swerve and jump the ditch and get into the gateway first; failing this, there was no alternative but to hit the steam wagon broadside at about forty miles an hour.

However, he took the ditch, jumped it, and got through the gate first. The wheels of the wagon just caught the back wheel hub cap, knocking it off.

They finished up on a lawn where the owners were having tea.

One woman in the car fainted, but the men kept their heads.

'You blinking fool,' Smithy said to the driver. 'Why the hell didn't you put your hand out to show that you were going right?'

'I'm sorry, mate,' he said. 'It was my fault, I'd no idea anyone was at the back of me.'

It took the two women an hour before they were ready to go back home, they wouldn't continue the trip.

'Mr. Smith,' said the man, after they had arrived home, 'if it hadn't been for your skill and presence of mind we would all be lying dead now, and I don't know how to thank you. I will be very pleased if you will accept double for what you were going to charge us.'

'But you didn't go the trip.'

'That's enough,' he said, holding up his hand. 'It wasn't your fault, and all my life I'll never forget the way you handled that car.'

'That's nothing,' said Smithy, smiling, 'a car is part of me and I live in them.'

Incidents like that didn't bother him so long as they didn't hurt the car. He often said that he'd sooner hurt himself than a good car, even if it was well insured.

Talking about insurance jobs on cars, he had quite a few.

According to Smithy, insurance companies pay out thousands of pounds a year through motor claims which could easily be reduced to hundreds if they went the right way about it. For instance, one day one of Smithy's clients had a smash. It was one of those that looked much worse than it was. The bonnet and radiator were badly bent, but the vital parts weren't touched.

As usual, on these jobs an estimate was written out for the cost of repairs, in detail, and sent to the insurance company.

Next day a very dapper young man came, who was inspector for that company. Pulling papers out of his pocket, including the estimate, he started checking each item off, as he examined them on the car. While bending over the car he stopped and kept looking at the engine.

'There's something here you've missed,' he said, looking at Smithy with a sort of superior smile, as much as to say, 'I know more about cars than you do.'

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'What's that?' said Smithy, coming round to his side.

'Why, just look at that engine, it's sloping backwards. It's been knocked back out of line.'

Smithy looked at the engine, then at the man to see if he was trying to pull his leg. 'Blimey, so it is. I didn't see that.'

'Good job I did, or you would have been well out of pocket on this job.'

'Yes, thank you very much for spotting it for me.'

'That means taking the engine out and straightening the chassis,' said the man. 'How much more will that be?'

'That will be another ten pounds,' said Smithy seriously.

'Yes, I think that is a fair price. Well, carry on with it. Good morning.'

'Good morning, and thank you again,' answered Smithy, thinking to himself, 'You blinking fool, I don't know how chaps like you get those jobs.'

It so happened that on this particular make of car the engines are fixed into the chassis on the slant. But when the chap said it was bashed back it wasn't for Smithy to say that it wasn't.

This is only one case, but it wouldn't do to give any more trade secrets away or the companies might get some really good engineers, who know what a car is and what can be straightened and what can't. Of all the companies Smithy has worked for, only once has he come across a real good man and then it was a case of when Greek meets Greek. But Smithy won in the end, details of which, however, he cannot write.

As time went by motor cycles got far too common, so Smithy decided to swop his for a small light car.

It was a funny little thing, driven by a chain and had a motor cycle engine to run it.

The trouble was it looked better than it was. Every time he took a girl out in it, it was sure to konk out, mostly the chain would come off, and he would have to get out and get under, coming from underneath covered with grease. That meant that he wouldn't be able to do any spooning, because his hands weren't clean enough.

One day when he was out with a nice girl it started to rain cats and dogs and didn't stop that night. Smithy badly wanted to do some cuddling or spooning, but it certainly couldn't be done in the car, as the controls were in the way, so he had a brainwave. By pulling the floor board up he said that they could both stand up and so be able to spoon in comfort, there being nothing underneath to get in the way.

'This is grand,' he said to the girl, 'it's just like standing in an entry with a roof on.' And it was grand, until Smithy happened to step back and knock the brake off, causing the car to start to run backwards. As luck would have it they didn't have to run far, because a ditch stopped them with a bang. 'Are you all right?' asked Smithy.

'Yes, are you?'

'Yes, I'm all right, but we're in the ditch and it is a good job there's no water in it.'

They both climbed out and then tried to lift the car, which didn't weigh very much, out of the ditch.

'Hopeless,' said Smithy, giving it up. 'I shall have to go to that cottage down the road to get some help. It must be about twelve o'clock, I hope they ain't gone to bed.'

He eventually reached the cottage, which seemed five miles away, and walked up the garden path. Then before he knew what had hit him he was on the ground. A damn great dog as big as a horse, according to his tale, went for

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him, but as luck would have it the cottage door opened and a man came out, calling the dog off.

'He won't hurt you,' he said, 'he's only a pup.'

'Aye,' thought Smithy, 'I've heard that tale before.'

'I've run my car into a ditch down the road and I wondered if you could help me to get it out.'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I'll call the men out, and if they can't do it I'll get a couple of hosses and a rope.'

Soon he was walking down the road with the farmer and four hefty labourers. It was pitch dark, and Smithy began to think he'd missed the car, it seemed such a long way.

At last they came across it and the men got round and lifted it out bodily and set it down on the road just as if it was a toy.

'There you are, my lad,' the farmer said, walking off with his men.

'Hey,' half a minute. 'How much am I in your debt for your trouble?'

'Nothing, my lad. You can give the men the price of a mug of beer if you like.'

'Here's five bob, and I'm much obliged to you. Good night.'

One girl that he took out was very anxious to learn to drive, so Smithy set about teaching her. It was most difficult to drive that car, and the brakes — well, to call them brakes would be an insult. It took Smithy all his time and knowledge to stop it, so you may guess what a girl's light foot would do.

That afternoon the girl sat at the wheel and Smithy sat at her side keeping a good look out for trouble. They were going very nicely until they got in a line of traffic and the

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car in front pulled up dead. Then bang went the little car into the rear of the other.

'Get out quickly,' said Smithy to his companion, 'and let me sit there. You ain't got a driving licence,' and by the time the fellow in the forward car had got out, Smithy and his partner were standing surveying the damage.

'What the hell do you mean by pulling up like that?' said Smithy, getting in first.

'What do you mean by running into me?' said the man.

Soon a policeman was on the scene and note-books were on the job.

'It's only bent your wing,' said Smithy. 'If you'll bring it round to my garage I'll soon put that right for you.'

'Right you are,' the man said, and started off.

Smithy heard nothing of the matter for about a month. Then he received a bill for five pounds ten for repairs to the car.

'Some hopes he's got,' said Smithy. 'I wonder if he thinks I've fell off a blinking Christmas tree.' He tore the bill across and threw it away.

Next came a nice letter printed on embossed paper and bearing the formidable address of a solicitor.

This was taken no notice of. Then another, a bit more to the point and very curt. 'Oh, go to hell,' said Smithy to the letter, and dished it into the fire.

A few more days passed, and an exceptionally pleasant letter came, to the effect that if the bill wasn't settled there would be a summons issued.

'Damn me, if I don't go and see that solicitor bloke,' and off he went.

After giving his name in, he was shown in to the main

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office to see the head bloke. That gentleman received him with a smile, thinking no doubt that Smithy had got the wind up and had come to pay; but if he thought police and any gentleman dealing with the law had any terrors for Smithy he was very much mistaken.

The argument began.

'You ran into my client's car and did the damage, so you must pay for it,' said the man of law.

'Yes, but it was his fault, he should have given me warning that he was going to pull up.'

'He says he did.'

'Well, he's a liar, and you can tell him I say so.'

'It's no use arguing like this. If it goes to court you'll have to pay, and the costs of the case as well.'

'I can't pay if I ain't got the money, can I?'

'Well, you're in business as motor engineer, aren't you, and the car is registered in your name. You will have to sell it, that's all.'

'Don't you believe it. It isn't my car, and it isn't my business.'

'Come, come. You're Alex Smith, aren't you?'

'Yes, that's my name all right.'

'Well, by inquiries I have made, the car and business is in the name of Alex Smith.'

'I know, but that's my father's name as well.'

The solicitor's face fell. 'Oh, I see,' he said. 'Then it brightened up again and he said, 'Well, you work for him don't you?'

'Yes,' answered Smithy.

'In that case, you were driving his car on his business, so he is responsible.'

'There you're wrong again, because I wasn't on business.'

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I was taking a young lady for a run and my father didn't even know that I'd got the car out.'

The solicitor's face fell again.

'And do you say you haven't any money at all?'

'No. In fact I draw the dole now and again.'

'Well, as far as I can see, if you haven't any money we cannot get it, so I'd better tell my client it's no use throwing good money after bad by putting you in court. Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Smith, and I might add you're in the wrong trade. You ought to be a lawyer. Good day to you.'

'Good day,' answered Smithy with a smile.

CHAPTER III

‘COLONEL’ YATES

As the little business got more established, more people came to see him and have a chat. Several were fellows who were out of work and thought they might pick a bob or two up by cleaning a car now and then. Some of them were a damn nuisance and would hang around from morning till night. Any amount of tools disappeared, and it was a good job Smithy knew the ways and means of replacing them without having to buy them.

The most usual way was to borrow some of the clients' tools out of their kits and forget to put them back. If the chap missed them they were there waiting for him, but if he didn't, no more was said, and A.J.S. was stamped on them.

One old fellow, who was nicknamed ‘Colonel’ Yates, came frequently. He was an old soldier and, according to his tales, had fought in all the wars since wars were started. He would come in making a cigarette out of ends which he rolled in a bit of newspaper. ‘Can't stand them posh fags, there's no bite with 'em,’ he would say, but wouldn't refuse one if one was offered.

He generally wore about three waistcoats underneath three jackets, which were covered by about three old overcoats; the top one was nice and shiny, especially the sleeves where he had rubbed his nose, which was always running down his whiskers.

‘What's the idea of all them overcoats?’ asked Smithy one day.

'Why, don't you see, if I'm out and anybody wants to buy one I sell it 'um. And not only that, sometimes I have to sleep out all night.'

'What do you have to sleep out for? You've got a posh mansion with feather beds, ain't you?' said Smithy.

'You see it's like this 'ere, I have to take the old woman a shilling every night, and if I don't there's hell to pay.'

'Surely you who have stood in front of cold steel bayonets ain't frightened of a woman are you?'

'You don't know my old woman. She's worse than a dozen earthquakes. She ran me round with a hatchet a couple of nights ago. Said I'd 'ad some ale, she did. I 'ad, but I didn't buy it. A woman in our street asked me to take some things to the pawnshop, and when I got back she gave me a drink. But my old cow smelt it, and didn't she let fly! Eh, what will you give me for this,' he said, as he pulled a china lion out of his pocket.

'I don't want the damned thing,' said Smithy.

'Give me a bit of old iron for it. I've been out all morning and all I've got on my barrow is an old bedstead and they don't fetch anything. They weigh nowt. That reminds me, did I ever tell you how I once found a lion's nest?'

'No, what was it, Colonel?'

'It was when I was in India; me and my mate were due for a month's leave, and my mate came to me and said: "What about taking a few baby lions home with us?"'

'You mean cubs, Colonel, lion's cubs.'

'Don't matter what you call them, they were young lions, and stop interrupting please.'

'"Well," he says, "I know where there's a lion's nest and if you'll come with me and keep konk I'll go down the hole and get 'em."

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‘“I’m on,” says I, “let’s go before it gets too dark.”’

‘Well, we went miles through swamps and trees until we got to some caves.’

‘“’Ere it is,” said my mate, pointing down a dark hole. “You stop here while I go down and hand ’em up to you, and if you hears the lioness coming shout out.”’

‘Down the hole he went and left me. He hadn’t been down long when all of a sudden I hears a growl and I looked round and saw the biggest lion I’ve ever seen. It had got an antelope in its mouth.’

‘And what did you do then, Colonel?’

‘I shouted, “Look out”, and made a dash for a tree and climbed up it quick. It came along, then dropped the antelope and sniffed in the air. Then it started going down the hole where my mate was.’

‘I didn’t know what to do, but all of a sudden I jumped down that tree and caught hold of its tail just as it was disappearing. I twirled its tail round my wrist and put my foot on the rock and held it back.’

‘Then my mate shouted: “Hey, there, what are you blocking the light out for?” I said, “You’ll soon know if I let go?”’

‘Well, what then, Colonel?’

‘Well, I pulls hard and yanks it up and swung it round and round wiv its tail and bashed its brains out against a tree. I was young and strong in them days.’

‘You are an old liar, Colonel. Last time you told me that tale you said that you held it in the hole until the regiment came and shot it. Here, here’s threepence, you’ve earned it, and clear out, I’ve got some work to do.’

Often policemen would come in and get round the corner for a quiet smoke. They were a decent lot, but such

scroungers. They would give you the impression that if you did any work for them you'd got to do it for next to nothing or they would get you pinched.

But as Smithy said, it's as well to keep well in with them, you never know what you may want. And he was right. Because on one occasion he had to deliver a car to a publican who kept a pub on the main road, where it was very busy with traffic. The car was left outside for about half an hour and when he came out a policeman was waiting with his note-book in his hand.

'Where's your licence?' he bellowed.

'Here,' said Smithy, handing it over.

'I'm going to report you for leaving this car outside here for half an hour while you were drinking inside.'

That made Smithy wild, as he never touched drink. He swore and cursed at the copper, telling him exactly what he thought of him. It all went in the little book.

'Have you got anything else to say?' he asked.

'Yes, more than'll fill that book; but I shan't waste my time and breath telling you.'

Now it happened that the publican was looking out of the window and saw all that was going on, so when the copper had gone he came out. Smithy told him what he had said.

'Don't you bother about that, I'll take you down to an inspector I know and tell him about it.'

They went to the inspector's house, and were welcomed inside; over a glass of whisky the publican told the tale.

'Oh, that's all right, Harold. If any report comes through I'll squash it,' said the inspector, and needless to say, Smithy heard nothing more about it, and, further, that policeman and he came to be the best of friends afterwards.

The fellow that Smithy took to get married suddenly

became a wealthy man and bought two cars, which were always brought to Smithy's garage whenever they wanted attention.

He was a funny fellow. Nobody seemed to know where he got his money from, and didn't find out until he died. Then it was known that he got it by swindling. Still, Smithy hadn't any cause to grumble. There was always plenty of repairs needed, especially after he had been on the booze. He would come and say that a wall had come out and hit him and smashed the front of the car. 'Get the beggar done as soon as you can, my lad, and don't leave any of the nuts loose this time.'

He would buy another car to use until his favourite one was repaired.

Sometimes he would send for Smithy to go to his house, and when he got there would say: 'I had to leave my car at the club last night. I couldn't start it, and I was trying until two o'clock this morning. Will you go and see if you can fix it and bring it round to me?'

'Righto,' Smithy would say, going towards the door.

'Oh, half a minute, you will want the starting key,' he would say, and follow him to the door. When he was out of his wife's hearing, he would say, 'The car's all right, and in my garage. Bring it up in about half an hour. I don't want her to know where I was, and if you find anything that belongs to a woman on the seats, for God's sake take it out.'

When the car was brought to the house he'd say: 'What was the matter with it?'

'It was the magneto shorting, no wonder you couldn't start it; it looks as though somebody had done it on you.'

'Ah, and there I was winding my guts out until two o'clock and finally had to walk home.'

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Often similar lies had to be told, until it got too stale, and his wife began to get suspicious, so he organized a breakdown one night when he'd got his wife with him, just to convince her that breakdowns did occur, and mostly at night on a lonely road miles away from home. But that breakdown cost him something. Not only was his car wrecked, but somebody pinched everything that was worth taking, even to the four wheels and tyres. He had to leave it on the roadside all night and when Smithy rolled up next morning he found it in a ditch.

'Well, what are we going to do about it?' asked Smithy.

'Leave the thing where it is. They might as well have the lot now. I'll go and buy another to-day.'

The remains of that car are still in the ditch, but only a bit of girder and tin.

The new car would be kept nice for a month or two, then a nice smash would start its deterioration, until it ended up similar to the others. Once when Smithy had to go into the public house for something he found several of his customers sitting down, and naturally had to treat them all to a drink. First one was asked, then another, until it came to the gentleman of many cars, who was already drunk, and drunk on champagne. Beer was much too common and cheap for him to drink.

'Blimey,' thought Smithy, 'I hope he don't ask for a glass of champagne.'

'What are you going to have?' asked Smithy.

'It ain't often I get the chance of having one with you,' he said, 'but I ain't going to have anything expensive, I'll have a glass of beer.'

The others looked at him with amazement. 'Fancy you drinking beer!'

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'Can't you silly beggars see that whatever I have it will only be put on the next repair bill I get from him?'

He was quite right about that too. Smithy was had once, and only once. He'd only just begun doing repairs on the publican's car, and when he took the first bill, which was only a few shillings, he found that both the landlord and his wife expected to be treated to drinks, and by the time he came out he discovered he'd worked for nothing.

'He ain't catching me like that again,' vowed Smithy, and ever after, the drinks which he so generously offered were already on the repair bill, as etc. etc.

The hire car which he was so proud of at first began to get the worse for wear and finally creaked up, making it a total wreck. But it had done good service and was getting to look old fashioned against the modern ones that were coming on the road, more every week.

So with the extra work he got inside he found that the loss of doing the trips made no difference to his earnings. He wasn't overworked, but had enough to keep him going and to pay his way. Sometimes when things were slack he would organize a fishing expedition and go out for the day. On one of these trips he got bit, and he was so disgusted with himself he never went fishing again for a long time.

There were only two of them, and after they had been sitting there for about an hour a man came up to them and said 'Good morning', in a very nice manner, also asking them if the sport was good. He made several friendly remarks, then dropped the bomb by asking for their permit for fishing in those waters.

'We haven't got one,' said Smithy.

'Well, I shall have to report you to the Fishery Board and see what they say about it,' and proceeded to write the

SMITHY

name and address down, which Smithy was soft enough to give him.

'Well, if that ain't a devil,' said Smithy, after the man had gone. 'To think me, Alex Smith, should be had by a yokel like him and his blinking board. The next water bailiff that catches me will be a smart 'un. I'll show him a permit all right, but it won't be made out in my blasted name and address.'

CHAPTER IV

EDNA

DURING the time Smithy was sowing his wild oats, as it is called, he came across his future wife.

'It seems funny,' he said one day at the tea table, 'but this particular girl is different to the others. For instance, if I am standing on a corner or any other place, and she is about, I can sort of feel that she's near, although I can't see her, and by gum she comes round the corner at the same time.'

'You've got it, mate,' exclaimed his brother, who was already courting. 'You're in love, that's how it catches a chap, and he ain't got the sense to run away from the corner before she comes round it.'

'Nonsense,' said his mother. 'You cannot afford to think of courting any girl for a long time yet. You haven't got any money saved, and are not likely to have at the rate you're spending it on motor cars. They'll ruin you.'

Nevertheless Smithy started courting and got into awful trouble on Thursday afternoons, which was the girl's half-day, because when she came to the house all dressed up to be taken out, Smithy would be underneath a car, covered in grime. That meant waiting in the house with her mother-in-law to be and having it dinned into her that Alex could not neglect his work for pleasure, and no nice girl would expect him to.

But it was a good thing for him, as it calmed him down a bit from raking about with different girls.

SMITHY

When most of Edna's friends knew that she was courting Alex Smith they said that they didn't know how she dare go out with such a rake as him.

'He's always all right with me,' would be the answer.

'Huh, then you're the first girl he's ever been all right with then,' they'd say.

The first sight Smithy had of his future mother-in-law was one night when he'd taken Edna home. They met her coming up the street with a jug under her apron on the way to the beer-off at the top of the street.

'Hello,' said Edna. 'This is Alex.'

'Oh, so you're Alex are you,' she said, trying to hide the jug.

'Can I trust you with my daughter?' she asked. 'I have heard so many things about you.'

'Of course you can. Can't she, Edna?' said Smithy.

'Let me fetch you some ale,' said Smithy, seizing the opportunity to make a good impression.

He rushed off and brought the jug full, thus making a friend, and they have been friends ever since.

She was a demure little thing in those days and couldn't say boo to a goose, but now she has lived with Smithy for ten years you may guess what she's had to put up with, and now it's a case of Greek meets Greek, and Smithy don't always come off best.

'I've trained you too well,' he would say, 'and now you're getting to be my master in craft.'

It is said that fair girls are a bit senseless, but Edna is fair and far from being senseless.

The first bit of spirit she showed was at a social which was held in a chapel.

A friend of Smithy's, who was a bit of a singer, invited him

to come along and bring Edna with him. There would be free refreshments, and admission would be by tickets, which he gave to Smithy.

The usual officers of the chapel were at the door, giving their bows and greetings to the members, but when Smithy and his girl tendered their tickets they weren't given a smile. It was more of a look, as though they had pinched the tickets.

'Cheerful crowd,' said Smithy in an undertone, 'anybody would think we were damned lepers.'

They found a couple of seats and sat down, but hadn't been seated five minutes when a man came along and said it was his seat and would they mind finding another, which they did after the performance had started. And what a performance! The first item on the programme was of course a prayer and a little speech by the parson, who withdrew with loud applause. Then came a piano duet by a couple of damsels who obviously must have been Sunday school teachers, because by the row they made on the piano they would have been thrown out if they hadn't been somebody in the chapel. Then came a recitation by one of the officers, as they call themselves. He forgot his verses towards the end, but received loud applause. The preacher came on the platform and led a small child who sang.

'Oh hell,' said Smithy, 'let's get out of this. I might have known what these chapel concerts would be like.'

'Let's hear your pal sing, and then we'll go,' said Edna.

He eventually came on and sang a modern ditty, which wasn't too bad, but the audience didn't seem to appreciate that sort of song, because after he finished nobody clapped but Smithy, and he received awful looks from those around him.

Next the parson came on the stage and announced the interval.

Tea, coffee, and cakes were brought round on large trays, but nobody came to Smithy with any.

Trays and trays passed by, laden with stuff; they even gave the persons sitting next to them some. One old fat geyser at the back had a tray to herself. She seemed to be queen of the congregation, because every one of the attendants that passed by went straight to her, so that she could pick out the prettiest cakes, and although she had a pile on her tray she kept swopping them from their trays to hers. Every one in that blasted place was eating and drinking but poor old Smithy and his girl. Smithy went red in the face, a sign that Edna knew too well. God knows what would have happened if at that moment a fellow with a tray of cups of tea hadn't come down the alley. He went past, but all of a sudden Edna sprang up and grabbed a couple of cups.

'Hey,' said the man, 'these aren't for you, they're for Mrs. Birtbox.'

'She's already had three cups, and we haven't had one yet,' was the sharp reply.

He didn't say a word, and it was a damn good job for him he didn't, because Smithy's blood had just about reached the dangerous point, and the man would have got the tray and cups all thrown over him and most likely a sock on the jaw. A few whispers went round and Smithy heard them. Dropping his cup of tea, which he hadn't started drinking, he said in a loud voice, 'Come on, Edna, let's get out of this rotten lot of hypocrites, I hope the tea poisons 'em. And they call themselves Christians and wonder why their damned chapels are half empty! I'd sooner sit in a public house among boozers and gamblers.'

By this time quite a commotion had occurred, and the parson came to see what was the matter. Smithy didn't spare him either. 'Don't you encourage young people to attend the church? The trouble is, Mr. Preacher, the young generation is becoming wise to your methods and don't want it. Good night.'

When they got outside, Smithy breathed the air deeply. 'Thank God for a breath of fresh air,' he said, 'it was rotten in that chapel.'

The reader must not think Smithy was an unbeliever — far from it — nobody is more at home than he when inside a church listening to a good service and good music, but this little incident was his first and last visit to a chapel, and a fine chapel at that. My word, didn't his chum cop it next morning!

His excuse was that he had to be a waiter and was saving some for him when he'd served all the others; then he was going to bring a tray down and sit alongside of them.

'And do you think we were going to sit and eat when all the others had finished?' asked Smithy. 'I can tell you one thing, I've never felt such a fool in my life before, and to think it took place in a house of God, as you call it.'

This particular chum was a decent fellow, one of the out of works that frequently came round to the garage. Smithy used to find him little jobs to do, just to get him a little pocket money. But the jobs had to be done over again, nine times out of ten.

Smithy's workshop was known all round the district, and he was called to do many different kinds of jobs, such as electric lighting, plumbing, and all the jobs that go in as general engineering.

On one occasion he was asked to put a window pane in a

woman's bedroom. Smithy couldn't do it just then, so sent his chum to do the job.

He came back all right with the money, reporting that the job was satisfactory; but the next morning the woman came round to say that the window had fallen out in the middle of the night, nearly hitting a policeman that was passing.

'A pity it didn't hit him,' said Smithy, 'there'd be one less to pinch the bad motorists.'

That job was booked as three bob out of pocket.

Another job he was sent to do was to put a new washer on a bathroom cold water tap.

Smithy told him how to do it, and he went off with the necessary tools and new washer. After about half an hour he came running into the workshop very much excited.

'What's up?' asked Smithy.

'Come quick, Alex. I undid the top of the tap and all of a sudden something shot up to the ceiling, and the water rushed out so fast that I couldn't stop it. The water is running all over the bathroom floor.'

They both rushed to the house, to find the woman in hysterics and the water running down the stairs.

'Get something to put over the tap while we find the washer.'

He went on the landing and returned with a bed chamber, which he held over the fountain.

Eventually the washer plate was found and put back, with a sigh of relief.

The result of that job was a pound out of pocket, for re-decorating, etc. Of course, he was very sorry and all that, but he couldn't pay anything. Of course he hadn't got anything.

He'd do anything to get a copper or two. One way he

had of making money was to bend down and let one of the fellows give him a swipe on the backside with a length of brake lining for a penny a swipe. Twopence a swipe with his trousers down.

Another method was this. When one of the chaps went to the lavatory he'd tie the door with a piece of rope, then throw a lot of carbide over the top. Next would be the hose pipe. 'Now,' he would shout, 'are you going to throw a tanner out, or are you going to be suffocated?' If the tanner didn't come the hose would be turned on and more and more carbide thrown over until the chap had to give in. In stubborn cases a lighted match would be thrown under the door, with the result the poor devil inside would choke with the fumes and heat. That game was stopped when he had a taste of his own medicine. He was only just pulled out in time or it would have been a case.

Smithy by this time had been engaged to Edna about three years and had no more means by which to get married than walking into the Bank of England and demanding a thousand pounds. He simply couldn't save any more money. By his girl's manner she seemed to say 'It's about time you fixed the date', and poor Smithy thought the same. But what could he do? 'Something will turn up to provide the necessary,' he said to himself. Even over the engagement ring he was lucky. The girl had always wanted a certain type of ring, but that certain type cost a sight more than Smithy had got, so he set out one day to search the back streets. Every little pawn shop was visited, until he finally dropped across one just like the type she wanted. The price was right too, and as it happened the size was right. It was a happy Smithy who put the ring on her finger that night.

It's a funny thing, but all through Smithy's life, if he ever wanted a thing very much something always turned up to provide the wherewithal to get it, and something turned up to enable him to get a houseful of furniture and the expense of the wedding.

He sold three cars and did several good deals all in one month and decided to make the plunge, much to his mother's disapproval.

His father said, 'Let him get married; if they wait another six years he'll never have any more money'. So a wedding was arranged.

The question of conveyances was soon solved. All his clients placed their cars at his disposal. The gentleman of many cars lent the new saloon he had just bought and also did all the decorations with ribbons, etc., at his own expense, with the remark: 'You'll have enough ribbon to buy for the missus after you're wed.'

The little silver and red car was ready packed for the honeymoon tour. Smithy thought more of that car than anything, and he couldn't help thinking to himself when at the altar the parson made him repeat, 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow' — Bang goes my little car!

Everything went off all right, and they were given a good send off.

They had no idea where they were going, but Smithy had a few spare pounds in his pocket, so didn't care a damn where they landed, and as all girls that get married as those two did she was content to be anywhere by the side of her husband.

The tour was planned for a week, but after three days of hotel accommodation they decided that they would sooner be at their own fireside and returned to the two rooms they

had furnished in a house near the garage which Smithy loved.

Settling down to work again, Smithy made more money than when he was a bachelor. Perhaps it was because he was calmed down a little and gave his mind to his work, at any rate he did so well that he moved from that neighbourhood, which was surrounded by gramophones and dustbins, to a house in the suburbs. Most of his clients were disappointed and suggested having a telephone installed at the house so they could ring him up in cases of emergency. But Smithy wasn't having any, telling them he was tired of being fetched out of the house at all hours for nothing. He set an elderly man on to help him when busy, and in no time he knew most of the tricks of the trade.

Smithy says: 'If I have my time to come over again, I ain't going to be up to the neck in oil and grease.'

But his mates say: 'You just couldn't live without it, Smithy, it's part of you, and you are your own boss and can sack yourself and set yourself on again when you want.'

'Ay, there's that to be thankful for,' answers Smithy, diving his head under a car.

